

**Suspension of Presence - An Exploration of the Interconnectedness of
the Body, Space and Time.**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

University of Tasmania (February 2006)

Signed Statement of Originality

This Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief it incorporates no material previously published or written by any other person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LRickard', written in a cursive style.

Lucienne Rickard

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Lucienne Rickard

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all those who assisted me in the completion of this Thesis, but must mention the following people in particular:

Mary Scott and Paul Zika for supervising the project.

Jonathan Daniels for the countless hours of assistance in making the work and lugging my sculptures around Hobart. Thankyou for continuously telling me that I am not a very bad artist, and for the mountains of emotional support.

All my family and friends for their support, love and understanding. A special thanks to my brother Nathan and my sister Anna for always letting me know you are proud of me. Most of all, thanks to my mother Denise and my father Kevin, for all the things you have given me. I dedicate this Thesis to you both, and to Robert Baxter

Abstract

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Title: Suspension of Presence – An Exploration of the Interconnectedness of the Body, Space and Time.

This research is an investigation into the interconnectedness of the body, space and time. My interest lies in the balance between these elements, in their inherent influence over one another, and in the possibility that I can manipulate this balance. Specifically, my project explores the idea that physical movement – the negotiation of the body through space – can be employed as a way to effect the experience of time.

These ideas have been pursued in the making of a series of large scale structures – spaces¹ – that I have used to physically enact and experience this relationship. I have used the term “space” throughout this paper in describing the objects I have made. This word is intended to signify two things: The air-filled space, located inside the structures I have made, that my body occupies in the making process. And, the space *of* the materials that form these structures (e.g. plaster-filled space) that I force my body to engage with by wearing my movements into. I see these as synonymous, and use the word “space” to refer to them simultaneously.

I have placed my body in an intense engagement with these structures, performing repetitive movements inside of, and into the materials that form them. I intend my own interaction, in the visual traces it leaves in the structures, to generate a consideration of this relationship in the viewer.

The focus for this project stems from personal, everyday experiences of negotiating my own body through space. In moving through air, water and spaces defined by architecture, I found an inconsistency in the experience of time these places offer. Surrounding, isolating spaces

that affected the movements of my body – such as water – made it seem that time was passing more slowly than it did in moving through open air. This inconsistency led to a questioning of my own perception of time as being formed of finite, fleeting moments – a perception that separates and fractures the present self from past moments and experiences. Desiring to overcome this fracturing, I was driven to find an experience of time devoid of the structure imposed by the sequential passing of moments. This experience came to be formed of both the manufacture of space, and the development of a specific physical working method.

I have looked to the following sources to form a foundation for the research. My perception of time was expanded by Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory*, Henri Bergson's *Theory of Pure Duration*, Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five* and Samuel Beckett's allegedly autobiographical *Company*. These sources express the possibility of perceiving time as whole, and of being able to negotiate it wilfully, akin to physically negotiating space. *Company*, as well as early work by Robert Morris and structures by Bruce Nauman, also provided examples of varying expressions of manufactured space, and its engagement of the body. Beckett, as well as the early video work of Nauman, my own experiences of swimming, several collaborative works by Marina Abramovic and Ulay, and the movie *Gerry* directed by Gus Van Sant, formed an understanding of the physical tactics (exhaustion, repetition, restriction, rhythm) I used, in conjunction with manufactured space, to affect time. The written exegesis records my exploration of these sources, and their relevance to my own ideas.

The outcome of the research is documented by the objects included in the exhibition. They reveal the gradual progression towards a surrounding and restrictive space, evidence the physical process that took place inside them, and expose these two elements as generative of a suspension of time.

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Part One – Background of the Project & Central Argument

My research project explores the interconnectedness of the body, space and time. My interest in time extends only to my own experience of it, to the way I perceive time to be divided up into portions - moments - that occur sequentially then cease to exist except in memory. Equally, my concern with space is defined by personal, physical experience. I focus on the sensations I have felt in negotiating my body through space - in moving through air, water, or space defined by architecture. Common, everyday experiences have demonstrated a connection between my perception of time, the kind of space I move through, and the way I move my body through it (an hour spent swimming through water passes very differently to an hour walking on land). In becoming interested in this relationship between the body, space and time, I wanted to experiment with it, and investigate the possibility that, by physically negotiating a kind of space outside of ordinary, everyday existence, I can find a different experience of time.

Consequently, the basis for this investigation is the manufacture of "space". Following the idea that space is not restricted to being "empty" air, but can be filled or formed by substances like water, I have made space using materials like plaster and felt. The making process consists of me placing my body inside these spaces for lengthy amounts of time, performing repetitive movements that wear into it.

My use of the term "space", to describe the objects I have made, is intended to signify two things. The air-filled space inside the frame-like forms of my objects, which my body occupies in the making process, and the space of the materials that form these objects (i.e. plaster-filled space) that I engage with my body.

The space I have made tangibly encloses the body, can be felt pressing in against the skin, and offers considerable resistance to the movements made inside it. In these ways it is distinct to anything I have encountered in the ordinary world. Of course, these materials, without any connection to the body, could be seen simply as objects - blocks and structures. It is only in specific interaction with my body that I have come to understand their function as space.

This centrality of my body to the reading of the objects is indicative of an overall ethic to make working process and conceptual discovery synonymous. The research has been

literally enacted, and it has been the physical sensations of making that have channelled and developed my ideas and understanding of the things I have made.

Background

The project grew from my fascination with the nature of memory. I have always associated a strong sense of loss with recollection, feeling frustration at being irreversibly separated from past moments, and from the valued experiences that took place within them. My fascination with memory stems from my desire for it to offer a more tangible sense of the original moment.

As a result, I began my research wanting to explore the idea of a physical process of recollection. Interested in the possibility of a kind of memory stored in the body - in muscles, bones and tendons - I imagined this memory might exist in all bodies, perhaps going unnoticed because it can only be drawn to the surface by activities outside ordinary, day-to-day existence. I thought perhaps it was buried in kinesthesia, in the *“continuous but unconscious sensory flow from the moveable parts of our body, by which their position, tone and motion is continually monitored and adjusted, but in a way which is hidden from us because it is automatic and unconscious.”*¹ In searching for evidence of a physical process of recollection, I was looking for a link with the past that was stable and continuously present. I wanted the body to hold moments inside it, to make them as accessible and permanent as limbs. It is important to state that these ideas never overrode the worth I placed in living through new moments, but complemented it.

I spent the first months of my candidature collecting information on memory, wanting to better understand the mental mechanisms involved, and to perhaps find some evidence linking it to the physical.

¹ Sacks, Oliver *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat* (1985) London: Pan Macmillan Ltd, p 42

Spaces of Memory

Although having made a serious attempt to navigate scientific texts on recollection, I was disappointed in finding little evidence of a believable link to the body. Scattered pieces of information described physical traces of memory within the brain, but I found no suggestion of other parts of the body having the power to evoke memory. I looked to less clinical sources.

Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory* (1966) describes the evolution, over thousands of years, of recollection techniques and exercises. Most of these techniques involved extremely elaborate systems of hierarchy and association, which I found fascinating but confusing. The hierarchies involved figures of politics and religion I was unfamiliar with, appearing as transparent as complex mathematical equations; cerebral exercises. Buried amongst them, however, were the first links to physicality.

Yates recounts an exercise that uses physical structures, referred to as "memory spaces", to aid recollection. Places the rememberer visits often and is familiar with are best, like the home or church. The subject must imagine this place in every detail, seeing themselves walk through its rooms, sit on chairs, open drawers, plotting a methodical route. They must then imagine walking this route, scattering the things to remember like objects. In recalling they imagine returning to this place, gathering up their memories one at a time. Yates quotes Augustine, who speaks of these places as if they had personalities capable of response, stating, "*The place will give back to memory. Put something in a well lit place, and when you come back to it, demand the object from it*"²

Despite being a mental exercise, the imagined negotiation of these memory warehouses establishes an explicit connection between the body, real physical space and recollection. Remembering is translated into walking, seeing and retrieving a memory that is picked up and held in the hand.

Yates also included an etching illustrating an idea linked with this technique. *Human Image on a Memory Locus* (c 1533) (Fig. 1) depicts a small, bare room. A man stands at its centre with his arms outstretched, touching the ceiling and wall. There is no corner of the room he cannot reach from the place he stands. The image is said to express the idea that memories are easiest to retrieve when left in small, unadorned spaces where they can be immediately

² Yates, Frances *The Art of Memory* (1966) Chicago. The University of Chicago Press, p 5.

seen and touched I saw it as evidence of an amalgamation of mental and physical space. Completely fascinated, I imagined someone building a room like it in their home, and when practicing the technique placing their most valued memories inside. I wondered if, when entering the room in the physical world, they would feel the presence of those memories



Fig. 1

I found this thought in particular - of memories having a presence and being located in places in the physical world - familiar. I think I have experienced something close to it, not in my own home, or my parents, but in my grandmother's house. My family visited her often when I was very young, but returned only every few years after moving interstate. Even after not seeing it for years, the place seemed to be unchanged. I could sense my own accumulated time inside it, gathered in clots, caught up in chairs and beds, in the spaces under the stairs and inside cupboards. But when these places are lost it seems as though the pieces of us they held are lost too. When my grandmother died the house was sold, someone moved in and renovated, ploughed up those spaces.

In addition to Yates, my understanding of memory was informed by Henri Bergson's *Theory of Pure Duration*. Even more importantly, however, it prompted me to begin questioning the structure of time, and my own perception of it. Before reading Bergson I had given little thought to the nature of time, assuming that moments of it are contained and separate from one another, occurring sequentially then ending, moving into memory. I believed that, in remembering, only an idea or replica of the past is recalled. Bergson presented an alternative

Pure duration is the form which our conscious states assume when our ego lets

*itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. It forms the past and the present into one organic whole, where there is mutual penetration, succession without distinction. Within our ego, there is succession without mutual externality; outside the ego, in pure space, there is mutual externality without succession. In the duration in which we see ourselves acting, there are dissociated elements, but in the duration in which we act our states melt into each other.*³

In wanting to find a memory held in the body, I'd wished for past moments of time to exist in the present, and Bergson seemed to be articulating a state of mind where this was possible. His theory made it seem reasonable, even achievable, that moments of time could break from their ordinary succession and spill into each other, like water. Bergson was also pointing to the body as the way to make this merging happen. To reach this "pure space" there is the need to be possessed by physical action.

Beginning Making

Bergson's theory seemed to coincide with the method of making that I had begun to develop. Pre-dating any real conceptual resolutions, I was practicing a simple gesturing process.

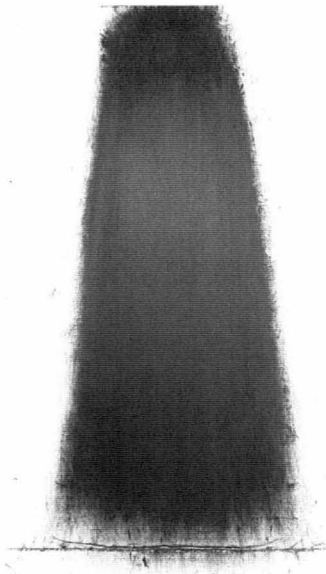


Fig. 2

³ Russell, Bertrand *A History of Western Philosophy* (1946) London: Routledge, p 763.

During my honours year I had developed a method of mark making that focused on the repetition of movement over lengthy periods of time. The marks I made were all associated with memories from my childhood of my mother brushing my hair. Each mark I made was a recollection of those moments. The accumulated gestures left on the canvas were meant as signs of physical expenditure, but also as a gradual amassing of memory (Fig. 2)

This way of working became almost involuntary, and in beginning my research it seemed the only satisfying way to continue making. I decided I would use movement as an abrasive mark, effecting change on my materials through a kind of erosion. The movement would not be directed toward a specific memory. I would choose a simple action to expose them indiscriminately. The process of performing it would be tiring and difficult to maintain. It had to draw out a significant amount of energy. This physical investment is a predilection, but has come to reveal itself as significant to the conceptual inquiry. The form this process took in the material has always been secondary to the daily act of performing it.

Before developing ideas enough to have resolved medium and format, I attached a piece of ply-wood to the wall of my studio. I stood in front of it for a few hours each day, holding sandpaper that I dragged in long gestures in the direction of the grain. I moved my arms as if I were swimming freestyle. Sections of the wood slowly disappeared layer by layer. This was not an experiment to solve practical issues. The wood was a material to perform the process against until I knew how I would use it to make work.

Swimming

The physical likeness of my working process to swimming is not superficial, but is a correspondence that informed my choice of medium.

Swimming consumed a large part of my childhood, particularly after my family moved to the Gold Coast. The warm climate and beaches seem to breed a culture of involvement with the water. I used to train for an hour most mornings before school, and although I hated the early mornings, I remember feeling intense enjoyment in being powerful in the water.

I lost enthusiasm for racing when I was thirteen or fourteen and my times for sprints stopped improving. I couldn't seem to move at speed and arrange my limbs to catch the water.

properly. I needed time to get the stroke right, to grab onto the water. Frustrated at not getting faster, I began to focus on longer distances. I always liked the languid kilometre warm-up we swam at the beginning of each session. Arriving at the pool at six in the morning, barely awake, I would fall into the water and make long, slow strokes, feeling completely at ease. Knowing the number of strokes it took to get to the other end, I could keep my eyes closed for all but the moment of tumbling to plant my feet on the wall. Being inside the water was like being in sleep, the thickness of it slowing and muffling sounds and movements.

I became interested in distance swimming because I liked the pacing out involved, the measurement it took to find and sustain the body's fastest tempo over a certain time and distance. I started to think about the perfect stroke rate to hold, a rate of moving that, in beginning, would feel effortless but by the end of the distance would be only just bearable to maintain. Swimming became a process of dividing myself up into portions, of metering them out carefully, draining strength purposefully and gradually. I wanted to make my physical self, my energy, span and fit perfectly within the distance and space of the water.

In swimming longer distances the structure of the water, the sensation of the space, changes. Sprinting a short distance means seeing a straight path through the water, a line that starts at one wall and ends at the other. The mass and density of the water is ignored, the swimmer skims over the surface. Sprinting is linear, two-dimensional. Distance swimming means counting the laps swum in groups of four or eight, moving through a path that continually loops back on itself. Movements are repeated until they dissolve, become almost senseless and severed from their purpose. The task of travelling a distance transforms into one of sustaining movement. In swimming long distance I have never felt that I was sweeping over the surface, but sinking into the space, expending energy into the body of it.

The Blocks

To return to the project, I wanted my choice of medium to somehow emulate the resistance of water. I also wanted to work three-dimensionally, so that the volume of time spent working would be reflected in the depth of the marks, in their spatial volume. After considering materials like wax and resin, I chose to work with plaster because it seemed a less toxic option. I experimented with a few small pieces, using coarse grit sandpaper. The resistance was obviously much greater than water, but felt consistent around the small gestures I made.

I cast the plaster into large blocks, the first of which measured 60cm square, with 25cm depth. Originally I'd wanted to make an enormous slab, around the size of a single mattress, but discovered such a large mass of plaster would need significant infrastructure to be stable. Wires and mesh inside the slab would make the space of the plaster inconsistent, interrupting the shapes I was going to wear into it. It needed to be constant, like water or air. I made blocks so I could stack them to build up larger forms.⁴

I originally intended to move on from the block form. Once working with them, however, I found I liked the simplicity and restriction they imposed. Working with identical units made it a challenge to find variations on how I could work with them, forced a concentration on the physical process, on the mechanics of my own movements. In this decision, I relate to what I have read of Samuel Beckett's choices in writing:

Beckett renounced external form and other adornments of language back in 1937. "And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or Nothingness) behind. Grammar and Style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. A Mask." He even turned to writing in French, "without style", as a means of avoiding the temptation of automatic association and obvious allusions. Using French also enabled him to "cut away the colour" and to concentrate more on language, its sounds and rhythms. Only unadorned language could touch the core of what he wanted to say⁵

The blocks were cast on the floor of my studio, greasing an area of the ground before setting down a four-sided mould made from form-ply. The largest blocks needed almost five 20 kilo bags of plaster mix to fill, and took close to an hour to pour. The grease under it made a kind of seal, so that when the block had dried and the mould removed the only way to shift it was

⁴ Early on in the research I considered the cast plaster, resin and concrete works of Rachael Whiteread. My decision to use large plain plaster forms made her seem an obvious source of reference in terms of the visual qualities I was working with. Also, I found the transformation effected by her casting process – her conversion of empty space into monument – particularly interesting. Upon closer examination, however, I came to feel that there were fundamental aspects of her work that placed it outside the scope of my project. Whiteread's turns space into closed objects. A viewer cannot physically move through nor mentally project themselves into them. My plaster spaces, although restrictive, are intended to allow a sense of passage. The viewer being able to physically or mentally negotiate the objects is a crucial component of my research. Also, I came to see Whiteread's focus on the space itself as being at odds with my own practice where manufactured space is used to surround and highlight a physical process.

⁵ Ed. van Assche, Christine *Bruce Nauman* (1998) London: Hayward Gallery, p 64.

to get down on the floor and kick it as hard as possible. The weight of them means that every interaction with the blocks is difficult and tiring. They require a physical commitment.

Accumulation Study One, Two and Three

Accumulation Study One, Two and Three were made from single blocks. Although originally made and measured to be part of a large, multi-block construction, the scale of the blocks, on their own, offered a satisfying ground to make small gestures into. When I knelt down on the floor to work into them, my knees pressed against the plaster, I felt there was some kind of equivalence - of mass or presence - between the block and my body.

Their size and weight determined that they had to rest flat on the floor while I worked into them. Although I'd made the moulds and controlled the dimensions of the blocks, I chose to make them a size that would present constant physical difficulty and limitation. I didn't want to be able to manipulate the material without investing energy. In making this choice I grew to accept and even find satisfaction in dealing with the difficulties of the blocks.

Before working into the plaster I wrapped it in canvas, making a skin around it that I tightened by painting with primer. The canvas was intended to catch dust I displaced in sanding, holding it to the block and allowing its form to change. Although ultimately catching only a fraction of the plaster worn away, the canvas stretched and became swollen, like blisters around the edges of the gesture.

Study One (Fig. 3) was made using the outer edges of my palms (the area that runs from my wrist to the end of my little finger) to wear into the surface. *Study Two* (Fig. 4) was made using the tips of my fingers. *Study Three* (Fig. 5) was worn into using the flats of my palms. I would work into the block for hour-long sessions, moving quickly and continuously. I would perform three or four sessions in a day, taking breaks to walk around, stretch or eat. After an hour of gesturing the entire lower half of my body would be covered in dust, coating my dark blue coveralls in white. It looked as if my body was merging with the block, as if the making process was some kind of sympathy spell I was casting over myself, causing my body to turn to plaster.

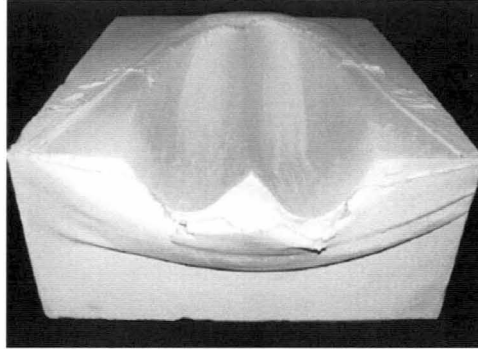


Fig. 3

In choosing gestures to perform into the plaster there were things I could quite obviously anticipate, such as its size and outline, and where it would be positioned in the block. On the contrary, every gesture and its shape always developed qualities that were impossible to predict. These qualities appeared because of small idiosyncrasies in the way I moved that became amplified by the process, by repetition of movement. The circular shape in *Study Two* developed to be markedly deeper in the half of the block furthest from my body. As I leaned forward and reached out I rose up, pushing down into my arms slightly harder than I did when they were close to my body. Moving through the half of the circle close to my body I must have, without realising, curled my fingers inwards. This caused a section of the shape to curve in and form a small shelf out over the curved cavity.



Fig. 4

In the transition between making *Study One* and *Two* my gesturing process changed significantly because of a switch in the kind of sandpaper I used. Making *Study One* I had used large amounts of ordinary paper-backed 40grit sandpaper, which ripped and wore very easily. I found I had to stop, interrupting the process, around every ten minutes, to replace the paper. In making *Study Two* I began to use resin belts of 40grit sandpaper, manufactured to be used on power sanders. Although it did make a small difference to the speed at which I

wore into the plaster, the most significant effect of this more robust paper was to enable me to move continuously. I could sand for hours without once breaking from my pattern of movement, could become absorbed in rhythm.

In *Study One* and *Two* the block contained the gesture. In making *Study Three* I wanted to see what would happen if I made the gesture push through the plaster, breaking out of the block and completing in the air. I wanted to perform the action in the two different spaces, to compare how they felt to move through. As I was pushing through the plaster my arms felt heavy. My whole body had to strain to keep them moving forward. At the point where the plaster stopped and my hands hit the air they slid forward, like there was oil underneath them, making them shoot forward and pull my whole body off balance.

After making *Study Three* I felt as though I'd exhausted the format of the single block - of placing plaster flat on the floor and kneeling over it - and wanted to find new ways of interacting with it. I wanted to develop ways to work into the blocks with parts of my body other than my hands. Although the rest of my body had been involved in making the gestures I'd performed, only my hands had been in contact with and worn into the plaster, and in a sense the process felt much the same as painting or drawing. Making marks with my hands meant that I had control over my gestures, that I could easily and instinctively adjust and refine them. I decided, in planning new works, that I wanted to use parts of my body I had less power over, parts that didn't have a history of making controlled gestures. In this way, I hoped to shift the focus from mark making to the idea of sustaining movement, of persistent physical expenditure.

From these initial steps I more clearly defined the parameters and central concerns of the research.

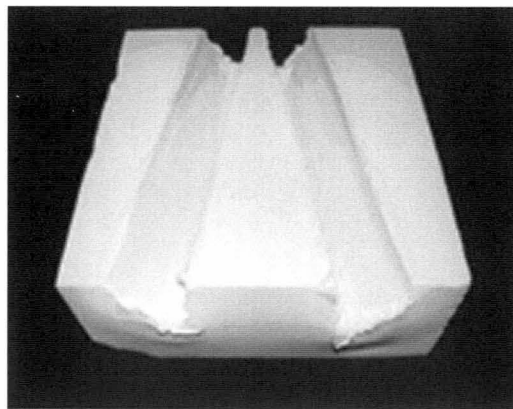


Fig. 5

Central Argument

The Making

My interaction with the space is a physical process of testing my ideas concerning time. It is also a making process that forms sculptural objects that express these ideas visually. The key elements of this process are, the conditions of the manufactured space (restriction of movement and the visual and physical enclosing of the body), the repetition and rhythm of movement, and the endurance of a difficult physical task.

The process places my body in intense interaction with the space. To discover whether this interaction will change my perception of time, prolonged submersion is needed. In making the work, a space is built that my body can enter and one movement is chosen to be performed repeatedly. Making heavy and consistent contact, I drag the same parts of my body over the same areas of space until I wear grooves. Because of the materials used to form the blocks, it takes several months - working for hours each day - to complete the making process.

The resistance that meets my body makes the movements a struggle to perform. I have to labour to move my body in a way that, in any kind of ordinary space, would be effortless. My space breaks down movement, forcing me to concentrate on each small motion. When I am inside it I am constantly aware of my body because the space is always pressing in, forcing me into uncomfortable positions. These physical sensations overwhelm and block out everything else. If my mind wanders one moment, it is pulled back the next by the struggle to shift a limb. I am completely absorbed in performing the action. The daily sustaining of this action necessitates both physical and mental endurance. In a kind of contradiction, this heavy contact and awareness of my own body generates a sensation of sympathy. It is as if, in the repeated contact, there is an exchange. We wear at each other until there is a kind of mutual exhaustion.⁶

⁶ The idea of sympathy was a constant presence in the performance of the making process. Although it has not taken on a central role in the research, it has been an underlying fascination throughout my candidature. What follows is an assemblage of passages from contextual sources that have been instrumental in my understanding of this idea.

That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is perceived) and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches

To make this process easier I move rhythmically, build up momentum and follow a pace that is comfortable. The sounds my limbs make against the space echo this rhythm. Just like swimming or running, it is easier to sustain the effort by pulling in air in time with movements. My pulse underlies these things I can feel it in my neck and chest when I have been making the movements and working hard for some time. The rhythm built up between individual movements draws them together, making them one continuous activity

This rhythm dominates because the spaces are both enclosing and featureless. They are visually and texturally consistent. They fill my field of sight and block out sound. I do not listen to music and use it to generate rhythm. The space contains my body in a separate, isolated place, eliminating all stimuli from the outside world.

Each element of the process combines to generate an alternate experience of time:

The difficulty of each movement forces my thoughts to stay limited within the physical mechanics of moving

Repetition means that there is nothing, no unique activity, to mark the passing of moments

The restriction of the space eliminates everything but the rhythm of my own body

These sensations that pervade my body in the making, in themselves and without being symbolic, generate a different experience of time. They reveal time as seamless, devoid of the barriers ordinarily imposed by the sequential passing of moments. They reveal time as something closer to space itself, a space that is both dimensionless and shapeless.

upon the world (the felt [senti] at the same time the culmination of subjectivity and the culmination of materiality), they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping. This also means my body is not only one perceived among others, it is the measurement of all, Nullpunkt of all the dimensions of the world (Maurice Merleau-Ponty)

Martin, Randy *Performance as Political Act, The Embodied Self* (1990) New York: Bergin and Garrey Publishers, p 38

I saw the familiar objects, companions of so many bearable hours. The stool for example, dearest of all. The long afternoons together, waiting for it to be time for bed. At times I felt it's wooden life invade me, till I myself became a piece of old wood.

Beckett, Samuel *First Love and Other Novellas* (1967) London: Penguin Books Ltd, p 11

[Ether] This adjectival form emphasised the active and constituent function, but most nineteenth century physicists could not conceive of attributing physical functions to space, so they posited a medium called ether, pervading space, which transmitted electromagnetic phenomena like wireless waves and x-rays. A book on the wireless maintained that there is "nothing absolutely solid in nature" and that it is possible for a medium to penetrate all things.

Kern, Stephen *The Culture of Time and Space 1880 - 1918* (1983) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p 154.

The Development of the Space

The spaces I made evolved in form over the course of my research. Each space is a logical and deliberate progression, changing to allow my body a different engagement. I manufactured the space in identical, block-like units, enabling almost endless combinations in how I stacked and positioned them. Every work, excepting the last, is comprised of these units. Gradually, work by work, the area increased.

The first three works were small, made from single blocks, and only my hands wore into them. The fourth work is made of two blocks, positioned like bookends, that stood on either side of my shoulders. The fifth work is made from six blocks, stacked in two columns - larger bookends. The sixth is a slab, six blocks stacked three high and two across - I wore into it with my back. The seventh is a corridor I walked through; sixteen blocks. The eighth a closed passageway that I moved inside; sixteen blocks. The ninth work is a wooden construction, a closed dome-shaped room led into by a three metre passageway. The inside is coated in black felt, a soft dark space compared to the hard white ones made prior.

Progressively, I used more units of space, stacking blocks higher, making larger and larger structures that would take longer to move through. Each one had to surround my body more than the last, block out more of the outside world and fill in my field of vision. As I added more units to each composition, it enclosed my movements. Eventually, I was met with resistance on all sides, making the process very difficult and forcing me to become ever more involved in the task of moving. Each space forced greater physical and mental engagement. The last work I made is a complete "container", a place entirely separate from the ordinary space of the world and the sense of time it imposes.

Viewing the Objects

A viewer looking at the objects does not share my experience of them. They see the finished object, the result of my process, but are not told of the exact physical tasks I perform. I do not believe that this excludes the viewer from an understanding of the altered sense of time I have pursued, but that the finished objects are simply a different communication of it.

In all but my final work the viewer remains outside the space, contrary to my own position in making. Yet the structures can be visually negotiated by the viewer, who is able to project themselves into the space and identify - in their own body - with its proportions and the grooves I have worn into it. The gradual steps I made in developing them, moving from small bookend arrangements of plaster, to large, all-encompassing structures, are shadowed by the viewer. They are led through a progressively more consuming negotiation of space.

As finished works the spaces hold the sense of the body having inhabited them. The grooves where I wore my body into the plaster, highly visible from outside the structure, are obvious evidence, and meant to provoke identification in the body of the viewer. They communicate movement, an expenditure of energy, and convey a prolonged, steady interaction between body and space. The sense of suspension perceived by the viewer is different to my own experience. In making, suspension was laboured for over months. To achieve it was a grinding, daily task. The finished objects hold every movement. The grooves left by my body, rather than conveying individual actions, articulate them all at once, visually revealing them as the larger, continuous activity I experienced them as. This visual suspension is more permanent than my experience as maker.

Summary

A significant feature that emerged as the project progressed was the strong relationship between methods of making (process) and conceptual inquiry.

During my honours year I made paintings about memories of my mother brushing my hair, about the inherent connection between us this act expressed. I performed the brushing for hours each day, making an exhausting ritual of it. Each day, I expended as much energy as I could, brushing until my arms ached and leaving the visual trace of my energy on the canvas. The making of each mark developed to be physical reinforcement, within my own body, of the connection to my mother. I saw these paintings as enacting my ideas, putting them into practice. Rather than acting only as a visual expression of this connection, the marks I made were also the product of the physical process of recollecting it.

In beginning my PhD research I wanted to develop this way of working. I wanted the making process to be a simple physical action, and decided to make pieces of three-dimensional space to perform them into.

In this way the research has caused my method of making to shift. Rather than performing a process in order to communicate ideas symbolically, I perform a process to directly experience ideas. My work is a physical, literal enacting of the research. I genuinely believe, in performing the tasks I set for myself, and interacting with the spaces I have built, that I am able to have a different experience of time. The sensations I feel in moving through this space directly form the answers to my conceptual inquiry.

The exegesis is structured to describe and analyse the central concerns involved in my research of the interconnectedness of the body, space and time. The following chapters are explorations of these concerns. Each combines a detailing of contextual material, insight into the gradual forming of a conceptual framework for the research and the practical progress of the work. This holistic approach within each chapter is used so that the exegesis can be structured around the three main components of the research - space, time, and body.

Part Two addresses the element of space. I begin by introducing the idea that not all space is uniform, that there are areas within the world, perhaps framed by architecture or delineated for ritual, that offer distinctive sensations. The early work of Robert Morris is discussed as an exploration into the language of space, into the manipulation of both the area of the gallery and the body of the viewer. Similarly, corridor and room structured works by Bruce Nauman are analysed to illustrate methods of building areas of space with qualities distinct to the ordinary. Once again, personal experiences of water are expressed to further illustrate this idea of a space separate from the ordinary world. Concluding this chapter is a description of the works made during the early stages of candidature.

Part Three focuses on the issue of time. Following a brief introduction presenting the idea that time is often understood through a translation into spatial, material terms, I go on to discuss two main concerns. The first is an interest in the structure and movement of time, and in particular, the idea of an experience of it that is amorphous. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* and Samuel Beckett's *Company* are discussed as examples. The second is an analysing of what I came to see as the pervading elements of time; rhythm and repetition. The structure of narrative in *Company* is discussed as embodying these elements, as are personal experiences of swimming. The chapter ends by moving from these ideas of time into a detailing of the last two works made using plaster.

Part Four addresses the body, with the focus split between two main ideas. I begin by using the work of Marina Abramovic and Ulay to discuss the idea of the physical ordeal. The endurance of a difficult task and challenging mental and physical limits is identified as

essential to the shift in perception necessary to achieve a different experience of time. I then go on to discuss the inherent presence of rhythm and repetition within the body, and my belief that these elements are evidence of an active relationship between basic physical operations and the experience of time. Early filmed performances by Nauman, the writing of Beckett, and the films *Gerry* by Gus van Sant and *A Space Odyssey: 2001* by Stanley Kubrick are discussed as examples of the shackling of time to physical rhythm. To close the chapter I include a section expressing the experience of inhabiting the space, followed by a description of the final work made during my candidature.

The conclusion articulates the outcome of the research, identifying the development of tactics to depart from ordinary time and the ability to draw together, from different moments of time, disparate pieces of the self in order to achieve some sense of totality. The significance to the field is also discussed; a departure from the symbolic art object, into a literal experiencing of ideas using ordinary physical actions. I end the conclusion by indicating the way forward for my working process; an assimilation of the, for the moment, isolated process into day-to-day life.

Part Two - Space

Simultaneous to reading *The Art of Memory* I was also exploring the work of Robert Morris. I came across an image of Morris', *Untitled (Standing Box)* (1969), at the same time as seeing the diagram of the *Memory Locus*. The two images seemed to complement one another and since then I have always viewed them as a pair (Fig. 6). This coupling, as well as the mental memory spaces described by Yates, triggered my interest in the manufacture of space and in the distinct qualities it can be given by separating it from the ordinary world.

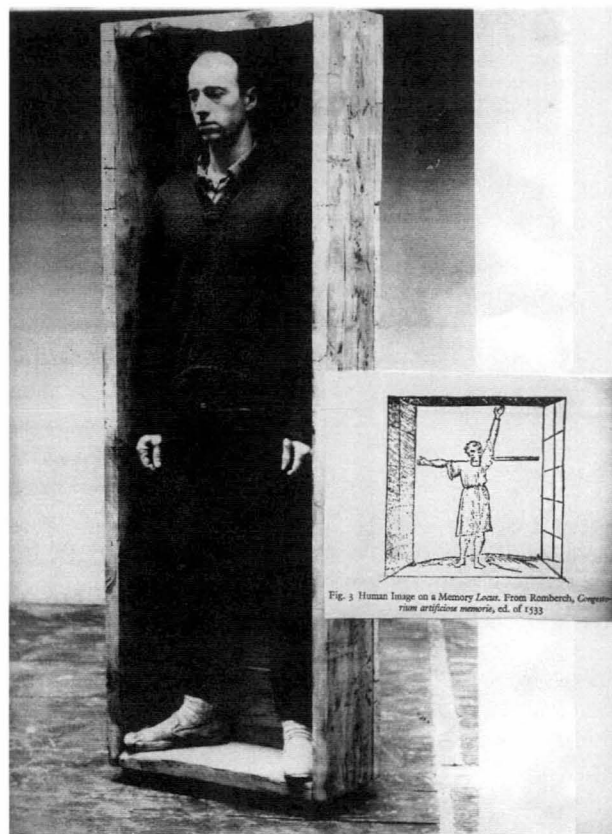


Fig. 6

I went on to study artists who had manufactured space, focusing on Morris' early geometrical sculptures as well as Bruce Nauman's "room" works. I was looking for manifestations of space that had some kind of physical effect or power over the viewer. As well as being interested in the experience these spaces offer, I was also attracted to the idea of entering them, to moving through the point where ordinary space meets the separate space; the

limen¹ Liminality is a term used in describing rituals, particularly rites of passage, that centre around a change to the participant. This change is accomplished by *“separating the participants from the rest of their social group; a period during which one is “betwixt and between”, neither one status or the other, and a period during which one’s new social status is confirmed. The liminal stage is characterised by ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy. One’s sense of identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation. Liminality is a period of transition, during which one’s normal limits of thought, self-understanding, and behaviour are relaxed, opening the way to something new.”*²

Flann O’Brien describes this crossing of the threshold in *The Third Policeman*. His protagonist, in breaking into a ghostly house, inadvertently enters another realm where space and time display strange characteristics.

*Standing on a derelict flowerbed, I tried to push up the sash of the first window on the left. It yielded to my strength, raspingly and stubbornly. I clamoured through the opening and found myself, not at once in a room, but crawling along the deepest window-ledge I have ever seen. When I reached the floor and jumped noisily down upon it, the open window seemed very far away and much too small to have admitted me.*³

My interest was also drawn to real-world equivalents. I spent time researching ritualised space and the physical ways these areas are delineated. I came to associate the articulation of spaces inside cathedrals and monasteries, as well as structures of earlier, non-Christian religions, with the work of Morris and Nauman. The tactics used in delineating them somehow create a distinct, separate area where the space itself gains characteristics outside of the ordinary. David Summers describes many of these places in *Real Spaces, World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, the Shinto (Fig. 7 & 8) being one example:

*The Japanese Shinto is a site regarded as the dwelling place of a (usually benevolent) spirit. The sites are self-proclaiming, but they are also articulated by bounding, to preserve and contain their power, but also to distinguish them, and to ensure and shape ritual access to them. The extra-ordinary is thus at once marked off as literally outside the ordinary and made addressable as the extra-ordinary... A place within a place is distinguished.*⁴

¹ From the Latin word *li-men*, meaning “a threshold” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

³ O’Brien, Flann *The Third Policeman* (1967) London: Grafton Books, p. 22

⁴ Summers, David *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (2003) London

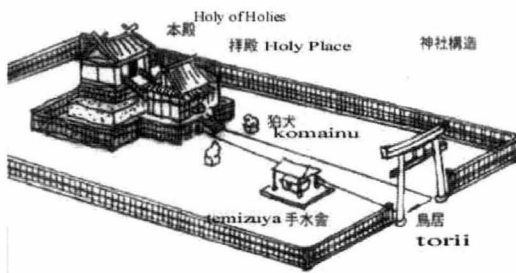


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Robert Morris

Robert Morris became a significant influence on my ideas of the space/body relationship because of the body of work he made throughout the 1960s and 70s. I identify with almost all of his work made during these decades, including the labyrinths, dance pieces, participation objects, the installations of dirt and asphalt and his *Blind Time* drawings. Emerging from the bulk of this period, however, were two groups of works that came to directly inform the use of space in my own work. Unfortunately, I've not had the opportunity to physically experience these works but images I've studied have convinced me of their relevance.

Among these works are several objects I refer to collectively as the "slab" works. *Columns* (1961/73), *Cloud* (1962) and *Untitled (L-Beams)* (1965-67) are large, sharp edged objects, based on the form of the oblong.

Columns (Fig. 9) is the simplest of these works, consisting of two elongated oblongs, made from aluminium and painted a dull, flat grey. They appear slightly larger than body size, and in the images I have seen, one stands upright while the other has been tipped over to lie flat on the floor. Regardless of their positioning, I see them as functioning as two slabs of distinct space, cutting into the soft air around them.

Columns makes the idea of space graspable because it gives it a size and mass roughly equivalent to the body; that is, it gives it a physical presence. It also threatens physical force - weight and impact - by the visual step from the upright to the prone. Each time I have looked at the image, I can't help but imagine an echoing thud. This impression is consolidated by the fact that "*Columns* was originally made as a prop for a dance piece for a performance at La Monte Young's Living Theatre in New York in 1962. In the original

version, Morris stood inside this wooden shell, which he toppled with his own weight after three and a half minutes. It then lay still on the floor of the stage for the same amount of time.”⁵ This work in particular encouraged the importance I came to place on the idea of an equivalence between body and space.

*Weight, pressure and resistance are part of our habitual body experience, and our unconscious mimetic impulse impels us to identify ourselves with the apparent weight, pressure and resistance in the forms we see.*⁶

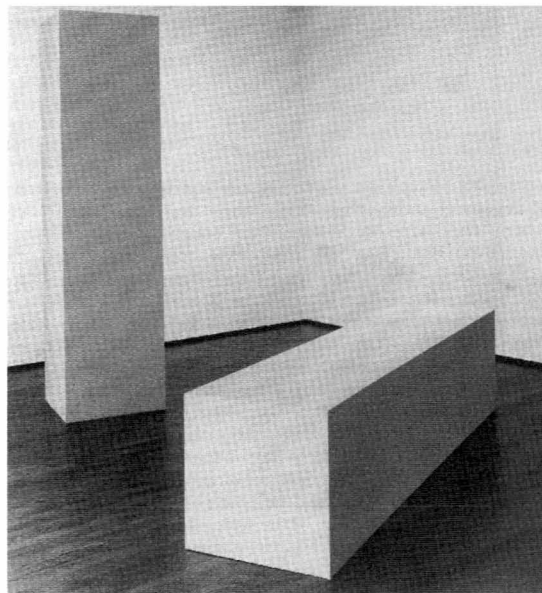


Fig. 9

What I am most interested in, however, is the possibility that a work like *Columns* could make a viewer then begin to see and feel these physical qualities in the ordinary space their own bodies inhabit. In *Minimalism, Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, James Meyer reveals that Morris was directly engaging with these ideas:

Integral to Morris's sculptural conception was a reciprocity of perception and production, of the viewer's bodily encounter with the work and the activity of making. "An object has a lot to do with the spectator's body because it was made by a body", Morris observed. "I'm very much involved with that relationship towards things that has to do with the body's response, that set of relationships towards

⁵ Meyer, James *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (2001) London: Yale University Press, p 51.

⁶ Bloomer, Kent C. & Moore, Charles W. *Body, Memory and Architecture* (1977) London: Yale University Press, p 27.

*mass and weight as well as scale.”*⁷

Cloud (Fig. 10) differs from *Columns* in that it is made of a single flat slab, suspended in the air above the viewer's head. Also made from aluminium, and painted the same impassive grey as many other Morris pieces, it seems an unsettling work because it looks too heavy an object to be hung from wires. It suggests far more obviously than *Columns* the idea of space pressing into and exerting a force against the body. To stand under *Cloud* would be to consider what it would feel like if it fell down onto your shoulders; to become aware of space pressing down as if there had been an increase in gravity.

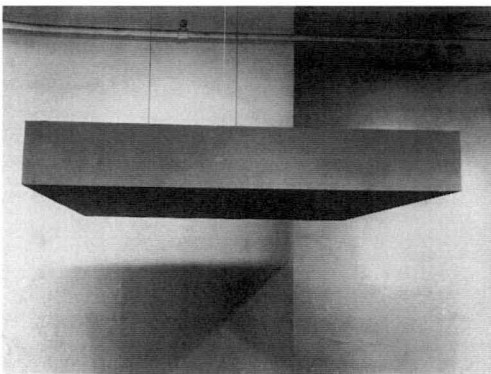


Fig. 10

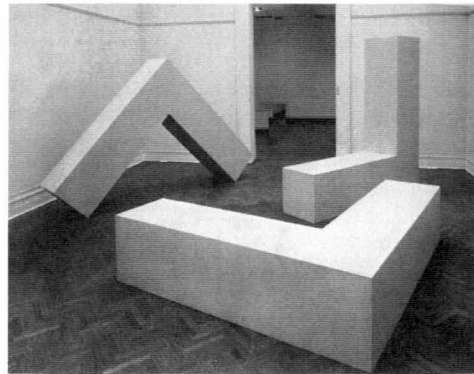


Fig. 11

This constant sense of physical force means that the influence of *Cloud* seeps into the space around it. Donald Judd was noted to have said that Morris's work does not offer "*much to look at, that they are minimal visually, but powerful spatially. Its an unusual asymmetry. The Cloud occupies the space above and below it, an enormous column... the occupancy of space, the access to or denial of it, is very specific.*"⁸

Untitled (L-Beams) (Fig. 11), made from fibreglass, came a few years later and is a variation on the oblong. Morris twisted his column into L shapes, making areas of space that are adaptable and can be positioned in multiple ways, for example resting against a wall to form a kind of passageway, or balanced on one of the arms so that the other extends up into the air. Morris combines them, so that there is not one simple expression of space, but a complex relationship of the space between the Ls, the space around them and the viewer. I anticipate that experiencing the *L-Beams* would be a more complex situation than *Columns* or *Cloud*. The space between two beams would feel different, perhaps thicker or tauter, than the space outside the composition. Meyer wrote that these objects "*take relationships out of*

⁷ Meyer, 2001 p 116.

⁸ Ibid. p 116.

the work and make them a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision. The work itself was but one of the several terms within a larger syntactical whole."⁹

In contrast to the flat greyness and impenetrability of the slab pieces, the second group of works I have focused on involves unfinished surfaces and passageways, with the viewer encouraged to physically move through the space. *Pine Portal* (1961) (Fig. 12) is a similar construction to *Standing Box*, with Morris using the same thick rough wood and craft-less method of construction. There is a huge difference, however, in the way the body interacts with the two structures. *Standing Box* resembles an upright "pauper's coffin"¹⁰, only allowing for a stationary body inside it. *Pine Portal* is for passing through - it delineates a space for movement. Maurice Berger wrote that, in making these kinds of works, Morris was interested in:

*...exploring process, the literal properties of materials, and the interaction of the viewer with the art object. By eliminating the base, for example, Morris was able to realign the spectator's experience of sculpture. Rather than approaching allusive, rarefied forms, the viewer could now walk along, around and even through the sculpture - a situation that emphasised the extraordinary implications of time and physical passage.*¹¹

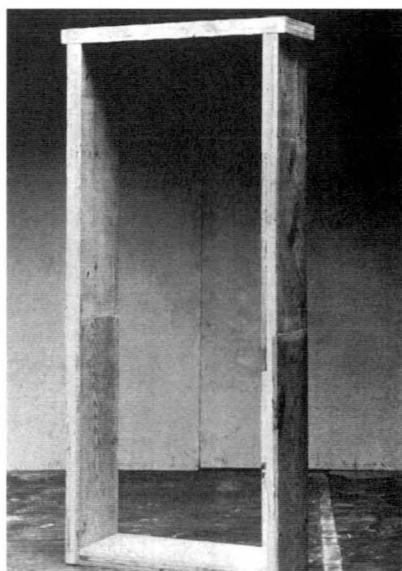


Fig. 12

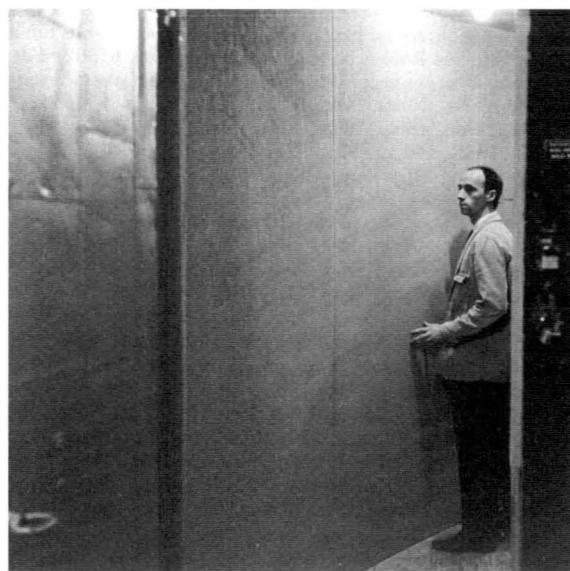


Fig. 13

⁹ Ibid. p 160.

¹⁰ Ibid. p 51.

¹¹ Berger, Maurice *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (1989) New York: Harper and Row Publishers Inc, p 52.

Passageway (1961) (Fig. 13), made from plywood and constructed as a contribution to the Fluxus events held in Yoko Ono's loft in New York, presents ideas akin to *Portal*, but on a more imposing scale. Morris built the curving corridor with the walls beginning comfortably wide but narrowing until they pinched together, forcing the viewer to turn around, unable to squeeze through its last quarter. Compared to the loose, open passage of *Portal*, *Passageway* is tight and drawn out. The space defined by the wood gradually presses in, aggressive in its confrontation of the viewer. This psychological tension is increased by the fact that the space is entirely closed in. Of *Passageway* Berger wrote:

The body's imprint is not the only way to capture a sense of it surfacing into external space. Passageway was an attempt to make palpable the body's physical limits experienced as a reciprocal pressure between itself and the space around it.

¹²

Bruce Nauman

Morris' *Passageway*, forms a clear connection to Bruce Nauman's *Kassel Corridor: Elliptical Space* (1972) (Fig. 14). Both works operate on the same principles, although there are some differences in their construction. Nauman's *Corridor* has no ceiling, curves in an ellipse and pinches in at both ends where a four inch gap is left for the viewer to see the outside, though unable to pass through.

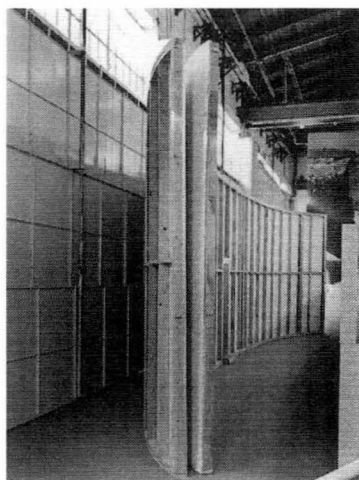


Fig. 14

¹² Morris, Robert Robert Morris: *The Mind Body Problem* (1994) New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, p 10.

The point of entry is a door built halfway down one of the curving walls, and the inside is painted white. The width of the inner space at its centre is 68.6cm, so moving from this point would rapidly result in the viewer's shoulders being pinned by the walls on either side. Like *Passageway*, Nauman's emphasis on the "*adversarial nature of space*"¹³ must surely be to highlight the experience of "*the body's limit as a sense of pressure pressing against the pressure pressing back.*"¹⁴

Nauman has made a number of works elaborating on the corridor, introducing elements such as cameras and monitors so that viewers can glimpse themselves passing through the space, fans to blow air through the passages, and acoustic material to dampen sound. Although I am uninterested in these kinds of additions to the space, a number of Nauman's other works are of relevance.

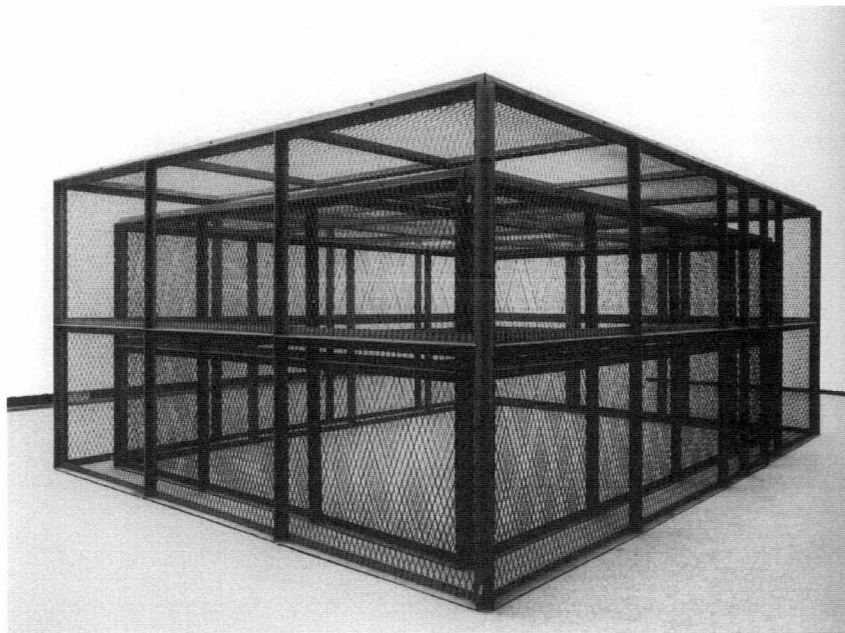


Fig. 15

Double Steel Cage (1974) (Fig. 15) came to be of interest because of its resemblance to the space I work in - a dust tent that surrounds the plaster spaces. *Cage* consists of two rooms made from steel mesh, a smaller room built inside a larger one, that creates a thin passage between the two structures. The work is entered by a door built into the outer room, but like *Kassel Corridor*, the viewer can only look into the inner space. Nauman has said that this

¹³ ed. Simon, Joan *Bruce Nauman* (1994) Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis. Distributed Art Publishers, p 76.

denial is aimed at generating frustration and anger in the viewer¹⁵. From my own point of view, however, *Cage* operates in two ways; as a space within a space, where the layering causes a kind of amplification and the inner space is doubly defined and separated. Or, as the space between the cages being a kind of limbo, stranding the viewer. In any case, the cages create a space that, because it has been made separate, somehow gains qualities ordinary space does not have.



Fig. 16

Green Light Corridor (1970) and *Floating Room: Lit From Inside* (1972) use light to create a separate space. *Green Light Corridor* (Fig. 16) measures over twelve metres long, three metres high and just 30cm wide, its width dictating that most viewers must shuffle sideways in order to pass through it. The inner space is lit with a green fluorescent globe which fills the space and spills out over the tops of the walls. Although Nauman was primarily interested in the affect this light would have on the vision of the viewer, I am excited by the way the light makes a visual threshold to cross. I imagine that stepping from ordinary space into the glowing green light must be like diving into water, feeling an instantaneous shift in sensation around the body. It allows for the experience of crossing the limen and a sense of the symbolic implications of this crossing:

The limen is a lintel or threshold, a way of passing from inside to outside (or vice versa), and in general of effecting transition between one space (or time) and another. Groups may construct passages within their own ritual spaces and times from one space to another, to adulthood and marriage, but birth and death are transitions into and out of the group itself, as if into the real spaces of communal

¹⁴ Morris, 1994, p 10.

¹⁵ Simon, 1994 p 76.

identity and then out of them. Birth, the first passage into the group, fulfils the meaning of the centre, and so to speak seeks the centre; in death, one passes out of the group, as if away from the centre and into the periphery, or beyond it. If the centre is the principle of collective life, then the periphery is the corresponding principle of death and exclusion, or of inclusion in the indefinite place of the dead.

16

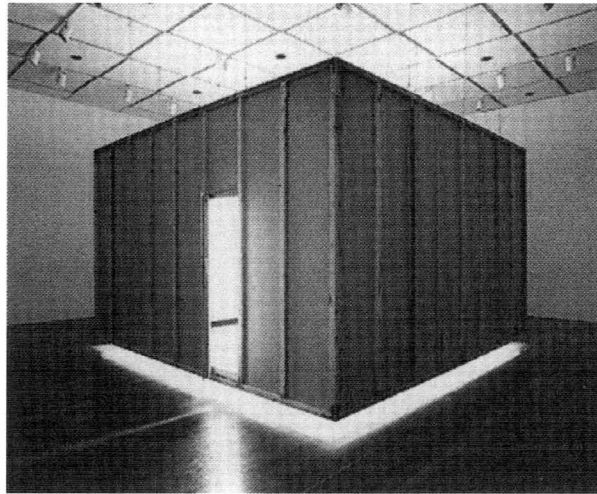


Fig. 17

Nauman has used lights in this way a number of times, but what I see as his most powerful articulation of space is *Floating Room: Lit From Inside* (Fig. 17). The globe used is a plain white fluorescent, and Nauman has painted the interior of the room white to enhance the glow. The structure is a basic oblong, 3m x 5m x 5m, with a door cut into one wall. What makes the room remarkable is that it is suspended six inches off the ground. The light inside extends to the floor, leaking out through the gap. It is as if the glowing space inside the room has expanded, burst its seams, and has raised the room off the ground. The space has been so transformed by the light that it appears to exert a physical force.¹⁷ Stephen Kern addresses this idea in *The Culture of Time and Space*:

In Einstein's mechanics everything is in movement throughout the field at the same

¹⁶ Summers, 2003, p 195.

¹⁷ This use of light bears resemblance to a method used by German expressionist dancer Mary Wigman (1886 - 1973). Wigman trained for several years under Rudolph von Laban, and operated her own school of dance before being shut down by the Nazis in 1941. Hugely influenced by eastern musical traditions, Wigman was known to strike a gong before beginning to dance so that the air filled with vibration. She used sound to thicken the air so that she could feel her limbs making paths through the space. Wigman has been recorded as saying that "dance is a battle for space within space", and that she often felt that it was space that pushed and positioned her limbs, rather than her own will.

*time, and space is full and dynamic and has the power of “partaking in physical events”. According to the new physics the universe is full of fields of energy in various states, and space can be thought of to be as substantial as a billiard ball or as active as a bolt of lightening.*¹⁸

Early signs of this fixation with space can be found in the video and film works Nauman made during the 60s and 70s. In a progression that included *Bouncing in the Corner No. 1* (1968) and *Revolving Upside Down* (1969) (Fig. 18), Nauman used his own body to perform simple, repetitious physical tasks, which were recorded on camera.

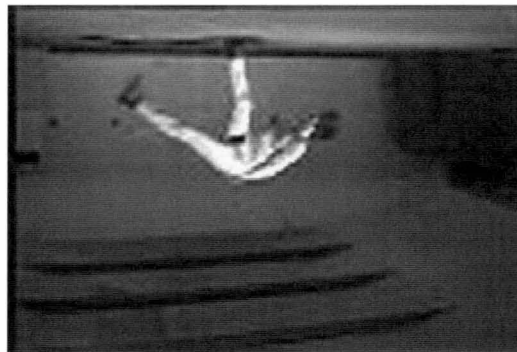


Fig. 18

Nauman has always exhibited these works repeating endlessly by loop to suggest continuous action. Of this decision he wrote that he *“liked the idea of the film just being there, of the idea being there so that it became almost like an object”*¹⁹. To my mind this looping - which eliminates any sense of beginning and end and creates an unbroken unending event - can also be seen as creating a kind of space that is seamless and timeless.

*Simple actions repeated endlessly and with no sense of beginning or end provided Nauman with a means to force the viewer into his process, his “loop”. Denying the viewer the usual building of involvement and subsequent cathartic release, Nauman opted for a more consistent repetition, a ruthless droning that wore them down; the viewer is receptive in their exhaustion. A tension is set up that engages the viewer, but is never resolved.*²⁰

This creation of space can also be found in the writing of Samuel Beckett, who often used the same phrase to begin and end a story, leading his readers full circle. This book-ending

¹⁸ Kern, 1983, p 154.

¹⁹ www.pbs.org/art21/

²⁰ Simon, 1994, p 73.

creates a space inside the stories Beckett tells, a space that exists because it is free of defining moments that might effect change on his characters, allowing the narrative to be unstructured and seamless. The most literal example is that of *Company* (1979), in which Beckett's character lies in the midst of a timeless, dimensionless dark. Yet in most of his works, even those that describe characters experiencing real, day-to-day events, there is no sense of progression, of movement in any particular direction. A sense of space pervades because.

Beginning and end are handcuffed together, departing from the straight path of linear time. The reader gets the impression of a space-time continuum. The same kind of thing happens in Beckett's plays: Instead of a linear development they present their author's intuition of the human condition by a method that is essentially polyphonic. ²¹

Water within Water

My grandmother lives on an island a few hours flight from Sydney. There is a pontoon anchored on a beach near her house. The council put it there years ago for people to swim out to and sunbathe on, but mostly it's dominated by shrieking kids launching themselves from it, fighting over its slippery surface. It looks like a giant block of white soap with an aluminium ladder attached to one side.

Under the pontoon there is a column of cold dark water of such contrast to the sunlit water all around that it almost seems made of a different substance, or that someone had formed and put there to support the weight of the pontoon. The column appears sharp edged and concrete on bright days, but depending on the amount of clouds in the sky it fades in and out of existence, its edges blurring and seeping into the surrounding water. The water under the pontoon is a space within a space, its qualities amplified by the surrounding cocoon of warm water, doubly foreign and isolated from the ordinary space on land.

I remember diving down and reaching into the column to grab handfuls of sand from its floor, so much colder than the sand in the sun. The roof of the column was made from dark green seaweed that grew on the underside of the pontoon, animated and swaying with the movement of the water. I used to scare myself by floating next to it and pushing my legs in,

²¹ van Assche, 1998, p 62

amongst the weeds, testing to see if something would bite me, feeling the clean division between the warmth and cold. The cold space felt entirely distant to the warm one, separating my legs from the rest of my body, making phantoms of them

When I grew braver I started to hold my breath and dive down, swimming under the pontoon to pass all the way through the dark. I kept my eyes closed or fixed on the sand, not wanting to look up and see creatures in the seaweed above me. The place where warm met cold was a sharp line. The pontoon was large enough to make a space that held my whole body. I could float underneath it and be entirely inside the cold. The water felt denser in there, seemed to press in tighter around my skin. It felt harder to move, to pull through the water, as if it was offering more resistance. Although I knew I could hold my breath far longer than it would take to pass through, I felt my lungs tighten with cold. For a few moments I would worry that I wouldn't be able to make it to the other side. Pulling out of the cold and into warm water felt as distinct as moving from water into air.

Movement One, Two and Three

In making my first three works – *Accumulation Study 1, 2 and 3* – I had knelt over the blocks, the upper half of my body above them, gesturing downwards. Working from this position I dominated the plaster, I was in complete control of the amount of force I pressed down with, and the amount of resistance that met my body. If I felt tired I could soften my movements, make the process easier. I could choose the extent to which I engaged with the plaster.

The difficulty was in developing ways of working with the blocks that paralleled moving through space. I wanted the plaster to surround my body, to be met with resistance on all sides so that my engagement with it could be as complete as possible. I decided to use more blocks, to place them around my body and perform the process inside them. With the plaster surrounding me I would have to use the same amount of force and energy to make every movement.

I began by working into two blocks. Unsure of how I would move between them, and of what parts of my body I would use to sand. I spent time experimenting with different ways of positioning them. For each placement of the blocks I tried different ways of including my body in the arrangement, testing out how it felt in the space between the plaster and making various movements to see which parts of my body came into contact with the blocks

Ultimately, to make what became *Movement One*, I placed the blocks upright, facing each other, shoulder-width apart. The smooth white of their faces bounced light back and forth between them, making it glow and amplify

At first I thought to work into the blocks using my legs, standing upright between them and performing marching movements, dragging my feet, heels and shins up and down the inside faces. After spending a short time testing this action I became aware of the fact that most of my body was outside the plaster. I realised I wanted most of my body occupying the area between the blocks. They had to take up my field of vision. My ears had to be close to the sandpaper as it scraped, had to be filled with the sound of it. I got down on my hands and knees, looking through the gap between the blocks. I crawled in, testing the width of the space, feeling the plaster pressing against my shoulders, clamping my body. I began pushing into the plaster with my shoulders, making a sweeping movement arching up from the ground

I attached sandpaper to my coveralls, cutting two pieces large enough to cover the area from the top of my shoulder to a third of the way down my arm and using Velcro and glue to fasten them. To avoid breathing in particles of plaster I wore an agricultural grade dust mask, and also wore gloves, goggles and a rubber swimming cap to keep it from my eyes, skin and hair. To contain the dust I built a tent in my studio using clear plastic drop sheets, sealing it to the floor with packing tape. Although it was made for purely practical purposes, the dust tent came to echo the movement in and out of the plaster spaces. Stepping into the tent to begin work felt like entering a distinct, isolated space, like pushing my body into the blocks.

When I first attempted sanding the blocks I found I couldn't perform the movement continuously more than a few times. Pushing back and forth, with the resistance of the plaster at both shoulders, was so difficult that I was out of breath almost immediately,. The movements were so much harder to perform than I'd anticipated that, after the first day of sanding, I had doubts of being able to finish the work. The process was difficult primarily because of the size of the gap between the blocks. In order to get enough purchase between the sandpaper and the plaster, I had to make the gap slightly narrower than my shoulders. If the blocks had been a comfortable distance apart my shoulders would have skimmed the plaster, making barely any headway at all. The only way to get enough force behind the sandpaper was to push my body through a gap too small for it. Compared to making the single block works, *Movement One* felt like swimming in concrete

This difficulty of movement inevitably caused changes in the way I performed the action. In

making earlier works I'd been able to move continuously and smoothly, sustaining movement almost effortlessly for hours. I'd been able to let my mind wander to other things because the gestures became automatic, gradually losing any sense of physicality. Working in between the blocks slowed the process, made my body barely able to grind through the movements, breaking down the rhythm into jolts and stutters. The process became concentrated, performed haltingly in small bursts; it required total concentration to maintain. Although it occurred to me that there were ways to make the process easier, I resisted these, as I wanted to give my body a chance to get used to the work; I felt it was important to persist with this more equal relationship with the space.

I developed a pattern of working as a way to cope with this difficulty.

Twenty movements back and forth. Then a few minutes rest. Then another twenty. Then another rest. This was done ten times over. Then a longer rest. Stand up. Stretch legs and back. Pace slowly around the tent, shaking out the tightness in my knees. Back to work. Twenty movements back and forth. Then a few minutes rest. Then another twenty. This is done ten times over again. Then another longer rest. Stand up. Stretch legs and back. Pace slowly around the tent, shaking knees. Back to work. Twenty movements back and forth. Then a few minutes rest. Then another twenty. Then another rest. This is done a last ten times. Then I take the coveralls off and leave the tent.

I repeated this set once more in a day - leaving the studio in between to eat something and drink water - before feeling completely exhausted. This pattern of working was not something I could ignore or take a break from; it gave me markers, numbers, that I knew to be my limit. I had come to feel that it was important to the conceptual structure of the work that each day I should expend as much as I could into the plaster. It was as if, in the making process - the relentless wearing contact - I was somehow grinding myself into the blocks, passing something of myself into the thickness of them. The pattern was a way to measure myself out - like I used to in swimming laps - to determine the exact amount of labour and rate of movement that would drain all my strength.

Movement One (Fig. 19) was finished after just over two months. During the first few days of making I was able to push my shoulders all the way through the gap, so that they broke out into the space beyond the block. As I wore into the plaster and the grooves my shoulders made became deeper, it became easier to move. I was forced to keep inching the blocks closer, making the gap smaller. The closer the blocks moved, the harder it was to push all the way through the movement. Gradually, the path my shoulders took along the inside of the

blocks shortened. At the completion of *Movement One*, my shoulders were stopping about halfway through the grooves. The top of my head barely broke from the space. The longer I worked into the plaster, the more it closed in around my body, contracting my movement.

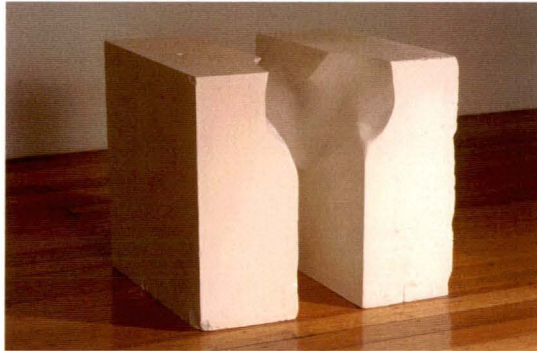


Fig. 19

The next two works were made simultaneously. The two structures were built next to each other, and I made a dust tent that encompassed them both. I started staying inside the tent for longer periods of time, for perhaps five or six hours without a break, able to work continuously by swapping between the two structures, performing different movements into each.

Movement Two (Fig. 20) is made from six blocks, stacked to make two even columns. The columns stand at 1.8m high, with the narrow sides of the blocks facing into a gap. They are tall enough to surround my whole body, pressing in on both sides, when I stand upright between them. I made the space this size so that the marks left in it would indicate a standing body, wanting to impart a sense of the movements I made into the body of the viewer.

Once again, I decided to use my shoulders to wear into the plaster. After spending so many hours working into the blocks, I had come to learn which parts of my body coped best under the abuse of the working process. Fleshy parts get pinched and pulled, they bruise and blister easily. At the shoulder the skin is tight, close to the bone.

Compared to the previous works I'd made, *Movement Two* was a slightly easier task. After just under two months I was satisfied with the depth of the grooves in the plaster. I found the work easier because the muscles in my legs, the part of my body I used to generate the force to push my shoulders through the blocks, were quick to adapt to the process.

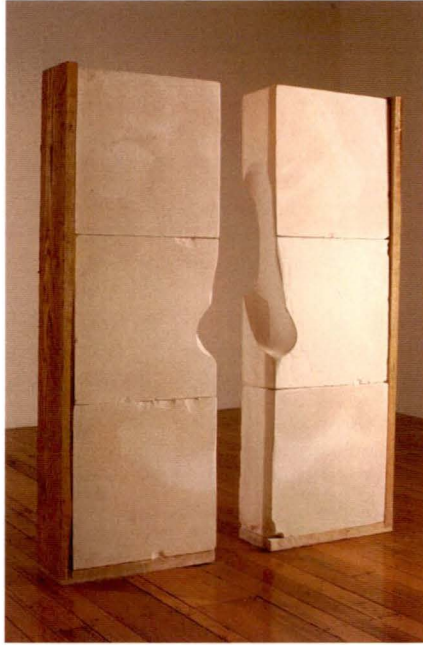


Fig. 20

Movement Three (Fig. 21) was made from six blocks stacked into a solid slab. Concerned about their stability, and also wanting to experiment with closing in the space around the plaster, I made a heavy wooden frame, slightly overhanging the slab, that clamped the blocks in place. The overhang defined the area my body occupied in wearing into the blocks, but also introduced a sense of claustrophobia. The wooden frame took on the appearance of a passageway that had been permanently sealed over.

Initially, I tried ways of wearing into the plaster while facing into it. I liked the idea of having to stare into the blocks all day while I worked. Unfortunately, I found it incredibly difficult to maintain my balance while pressing forward against the blocks, and couldn't push enough weight into my movements. I found I had to turn around and work into the slab with my back. As I worked at the plaster it would feel as if it were heating under my back. It might have been the friction between it and the sandpaper that caused it to warm because the front of my body, my face, stayed cool. It felt the same as moving in an open air pool, swimming face down in the water with the sun heating my back, burning through to my lungs.

The movement also caused my coveralls to shift and rub on my back. The edges of the sandpaper and the glue, that had soaked through the material and hardened, constantly irritated my skin. I developed blisters and grazes, mostly on my shoulder blades. To combat this I pulled the material tight around my arms and waist before tightly winding packing tape around them, trying to keep the coverall taut. I didn't attempt to find more gentle ways of

working. I had developed a kind of conviction that I had to treat my body like a tool or machine, and that if the process was uncomfortable I was only allowed to make small adjustments that would enable me to keep working from day to day. I didn't want to make any changes that would stop me experiencing the process.

In using my back, I pictured making a perfectly ovular groove in the slab, like a shallow bath that I would sink into each time I performed the action. At the end of the process, however, the shape in the plaster was far more irregular than I'd anticipated, displaying small curves and channels that evidenced the lessened control I had over the mark I was making.



Fig. 21

Part Three - Time

The strange temporal qualities I had found in certain kinds of space caused a shifting in my interest away from memory, into the idea of time itself. As well as becoming increasingly aware of its connection to space, I started to question the structure and movement of time.

In searching for information I was drawn, in particular, to the use of metaphors in philosophical articulations of time. Like many of the techniques in *The Art of Memory*, time was translated into physical, spatial terms. At first I thought this conversion was simply convenient, a way for man to begin to grasp such an irresistible, all-encompassing phenomena. Yet as the research progressed I became convinced that these metaphors were indicative of an innate, concrete, interconnection between space and time. Kern recounts some of these articulations:

*Since the ancient Greeks there has been a controversy about the structure of time. Some thinkers, such as Hume, argued that it was composed of discrete parts - infinitesimal instants that contributed to longer durations the way points made up a line. This interpretation was rejected by [others], who argued for a thickened present... E.R. Clay argued that the present is part of the recent past as the path of a meteor seems to be "contained in the present", and he defined this interval on the "specious present". William James adopted the concept: "the practically cognised present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time."*¹



Fig. 22

¹ Kern, 1983, p 83.

The making of my first three works, however, caused me to realise that the expression of time within my making process was more closely aligned with an articulation - of a much more aggressive, active nature than "pure space" - of Henri Bergson's:

In 1896 he described the present as the "indivisible progress of the past gnawing into the future." Years later he repeated that predatory image of duration as "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances." He pushed the metaphor even further by elaborating on the masticatory action of the past on the present. "Real duration gnaws on things and leaves on them the mark of its tooth." Human consciousness is not the tranquil passage of discrete ideas imagined by the associationist psychologists; rather, it is a thunderous action of memories that interlace, permeate, melt into, drag down, and gnaw on the present experience.²

My inquiry into time led to two main areas of interest. The first was a search for expressions of time that stray from the ordinary structure I experience in day-to-day life, from the sequential passing of moments. The second was an analysing of what I came to see as the pervading elements of time – repetition and rhythm

Amorphous Time - *Slaughterhouse 5* and *Company*

Informing the experimentation with time and space that was taking place in my work were two novels. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969), and Samuel Beckett's allegedly autobiographical *Company* (1979)

Slaughterhouse 5, blending science-fiction with a strong anti-war sentiment, tells the story of the life of Billy Pilgrim. It begins:

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another in 1941. He has gone back through that door to find himself in 1963. He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random

² Ibid p 43.

*visits to all the events in between.*³

Billy's grip on his position in time is loose. He first comes unstuck in 1944, as a soldier in World War Two. One moment he is on the run behind enemy lines, trudging through the snow, then he blinks his eyes and is a small boy, smelling of chlorine. He is being taught to swim by his father at the YMCA pool. These moments happen to Billy regularly, causing him confusion and distress, particularly when he slides back to moments he wished he hadn't lived through in the first place. He experiences being a prisoner of war in Dresden over and over, becoming familiar with the horrors of its firebombing. Vonnegut uses this time slippage to cut and paste the order of events, making weird juxtapositions of Billy's life. Billy walks out of a putrid latrine in Dresden, where he and the other inmates are all suffering acute diarrhea, and walks into a hotel room into the arms of his wife on their wedding night.

Billy never seems to question his loose grip on time until he is kidnapped by aliens from Tralfamadore. They take him to their planet where he is kept in a zoo and bred with a beautiful movie star. Ultimately passive, he does not resent being taken from his home, and comes to like and admire the aliens who keep him captive. In talking with them he discovers their understanding of time is vastly different to that of earthlings, but extremely applicable to his own disposition.

*Billy Pilgrim says that the universe does not look like a lot of bright little dots to the creatures from Tralfamadore. The creatures can see where each star has been and where it is going, so that the heavens are filled with rarefied luminous spaghetti. And Tralfamadorians don't see human beings as two legged creatures, either. They see them as great millipedes - "with babies legs at one end and old peoples legs at the other", says Billy Pilgrim.*⁴

The aliens tell Billy that the reason he slips around in time is because all the moments of his life exist together, all at once as a seamless entity. Every moment of his life is permanent, and wait for him to fall back into them. Eventually the aliens send Billy back to earth, and he embarks on a crusade to spread the truth about the real nature of time. To begin with he is labelled as crazy, but eventually gains a following. He meets his death at a rally for his supporters, is shot by an old war enemy. Billy knew of his death, he had experienced it many times, and eventually always slid back into the moments of his life. Moments before he is shot he farewells his supporters with the phrase "*Hello. Goodbye. Hello. Goodbye.*"⁵

³ Vonnegut, Kurt *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969) London: Vintage, p. 17

⁴ Ibid. p. 63.

⁵ Ibid. p. 5

Through Billy's story Vonnegut poses the idea that the ordinary experience of time - where, once experienced, moments seem to cease to exist - serves to make the atrocities of the world somehow palatable. After reading *Slaughterhouse 5* I wondered how people would cope if events like the firebombing of Dresden never disappeared into the past, but existed and were experienced unendingly. The Tralfamadorian sense of time allows moments a permanent gravity. Vonnegut, himself a prisoner of war who witnessed the firebombing and other horrors, states firmly that he does not wish to be like Billy.

Nietzsche also dealt with this idea of an unbounded experience of time, although in a much more objective manner. In *The Gay Science* he articulates both the horror and joy that this experience might generate:

What if, some day or night, a demon were to crawl after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life, just as you now live it and have lived it, you will again, and innumerable times once more; and there will be nothing new in it, but rather every pain and every pleasure and every thought and every sigh, and everything unspeakably small or great within it, must come back to you, and everything in the same order and succession – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, forever – and you along with it, speck of dust!" Would you throw yourself down, gnash your teeth, and curse the demon who spoke in this way? Or have you once experienced a colossal moment, where you would have answered him; "You are a god and I have never heard anything more godlike!" If this thought were to take control of you, it would transform you as you are, or perhaps chew you to bits. The question in each and everything: "Do you want this again, and even countless times again?" would lay upon your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how positive one's attitude must be towards oneself and towards life in order to want nothing more than this final, eternal confirmation and seal ⁶

My own attitude towards this idea constantly wavers. I think I understand the exhaustion Vonnegut expresses with the experiences of his own life, understand that he is old and his life has contained many awful moments. But I am young and have experienced no real horror. I identify with the reasoning of Nietzsche, with the idea that to consent to eternal recurrence is to adopt an *"attitude of complete and positive acceptance, not merely the joyful*

⁶ Wicks, Robert *Nietzsche* (2002) Oxford: Oneworld Publications, p 79

wallowing in an abstract feeling of "life itself", but an emotionally-complicated acceptance and immersion into the concrete reality of life in every infinitesimal detail."⁷ Of course, in wavering, I often feel that Nietzsche's reasoning may be completely inappropriate for those who have been unfortunate, who have not had a comfortable, horror-free existence.

Aligned with these ideas expressed by Vonnegut and Nietzsche is Beckett's *Company*. Identifying my own working method with the text, I have read it many times, and it has constantly informed my work throughout the entire course of my candidature

Company tells of a man lying alone in a space of "immeasurable dark"⁸ The shape and dimensions of this space, if it has any at all, are uncertain and serve to confuse the man who has somehow come to inhabit it. He listens to a voice that hovers body-less around him, projecting memories into the dark. They float around the man like currents moving in water. The voice describes memories that the listener cannot confidently claim as his own. He is wholly uncertain, wondering if the voice speaks to him or someone else, even if he has imagined his own existence. He is split by his confusion into "the voice of memory, the unwilling rememberer, and the unhappy perceiver."⁹ His confusion causes him to wish for silence. He feels as though the voice inflicts him each time it sounds

Time, for the listener in *Company*, seems akin to time as experienced by Tralfamadorians. In both texts the conventional, sequential passing of moments has been transformed, its structure removed. Beckett's character inhabits a space where he is not passing through time but floating in the midst of it. As if time is a body of water that he lies at the bottom of, letting the currents swirl around him

Repetition & Rhythm - Time

My empathy towards *Company* can be attributed to the sensations involved in my making process, as well as the fact that, in its early stages, the project was developed around ideas drawn from cyclical activities like swimming. In reading *Company*, and making comparisons to my work, I realised that rhythm and repetition were the elements by which time is characterised and negotiated. Kern analyses this all-encompassing pattern:

⁷ Ibid p 78.

⁸ Beckett, Samuel *Company* (1979) London: Pan Books Ltd, p 45

*Emile Durkheim distinguished between "private time" and "time in general", which has a social origin: "the foundation of the category of time is in the rhythm of social life". More concretely, "the divisions into days, weeks, months and years etc, correspond to the periodical recurrence of rites, feasts, and public ceremonies." Societies organise their lives in time and establish rhythms that then come to be uniformly imposed as a framework for all temporal activities, while at the same time its function is to assure their regularity.*¹⁰

Having recognised this, I became curious about what would happen to rhythm and repetition in a kind of time that has departed from ordinary structured succession.

Relatively short and laconic, *Company*, along with most of Beckett's oeuvre, is saturated with rhythm and repetition. His characters experience or recall virtually identical events over and over, seemingly caught up in some kind of ridiculous game or joke. He even repeats identical phrases, lending his writing a kind of pulsation. In *Company*, this repetition accumulates, seemingly aimed at reminding the man lying in the dark of his own life. The voice repeats phrases over and over, gradually adding detail, amassing information and memories in a painfully slow process of reinforcement:

A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine. To one on his back in the dark. This he can tell by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again. Only a small part of what is said can be verified... As for example when he hears, You first saw the light on such and such a day and now you are on your back in the dark.

You first saw the light in the room you were most likely conceived in. The big bow window looked west to the mountains.

The voice comes to him now from one quarter and now from another... You first saw the light at Easter and now. Then a murmur in his ear, You are on your back in the dark. Or of course vice versa. Another trait its long silences when he dare almost hope it is at an end. clear from above his upturned face, You first saw the light on the day Christ died and now. Then long after on his nascent hope the murmur, You are on your back in the dark. Or of course vice versa.

How far more likely to achieve its object. To have the hearer have a past and

⁹ Ibid p 78.

*acknowledge it. You were born on Easter Friday after long labour. Yes I remember. The sun had not long sunk behind the larches. Yes I remember As best to erode the drop must strike unwavering. Upon the place beneath.*¹¹

Reading Beckett has often felt like falling into a chant. The regular and rhythmic repetition of phrases means parts of the story become known by heart, anticipated, recited in the mind rather than read off the page. The words are transformed by their repetition, becoming more powerful. They accumulate and their meaning seems to amplify.

In the ordinary experience of time, rhythm and repetition are drawn out, spread over separate moments that occur sequentially

*The continuation of a rhythmic pattern evokes in the perceiver the expectation that the pattern will persist [Literary analyst] I.A. Richards, who emphasised this aspect of rhythm to the exclusion of others, aptly remarked that "rhythm depends upon repetition and expectancy. . . all rhythmical effects spring from anticipation... This texture of expectations, satisfactions, disappointments, surprises... is rhythm." But regardless of possible changes in rhythm, the actual gestalt of rhythm constantly provides tension and relief, deriving from the ever-nascent striving for the closure of the gestalt which is never wholly there but gradually materialises in time.*¹²

The structure of time in *Company*, or what might be better described as the absence of structure, generates the sense that repeated events, normally separated, exist simultaneously. There is no tension and release. The gestalt of time, of accumulated events, is wholly present.

Open Water

On the island where my grandmother lives there is a beach surrounded by a reef that lies a few kilometres out to sea. Waves are blocked and broken on the reef, leaving the water inside smooth. My brother and father and I used to swim up and down the beach, beginning from the point where a headland cuts out into the water, swimming to a boat shed about half

¹⁰ Kern, 1983, p 20

¹¹ Beckett, 1979, pp 8, 15, 20 & 47.

¹² Kreidler, Hans & Kreidler, Shulamith *Psychology of the Arts* (1972) Durham. Duke University Press, p 153

a kilometre away before looping back. We swam parallel to the shore, out beyond the line of boats left anchored by locals.

On still days the ocean felt the same to move through as a swimming pool. There was no sense of movement or force in the water. The only hint of activity were the occasional currents of cold water we would plough through unexpectedly, causing us to shiver and sprint through, back into warmth. Although we had landmarks to define the beginning and end of the distance, the water itself was endless, continuous. There was no way to see or grasp the dimensions of it. No barriers to break up the space. We couldn't launch ourselves into the space from the outside, we had to build momentum, starting by standing still inside it.

Strangely, I found the sensation of passing through this enormous space to be almost identical to swimming in a pool. I found the size of the water, overwhelming to view from land or floating in the midst of it, would disappear once I faced down into the water and started stroking. The rhythms and patterns of movement somehow encapsulate the body.

push fall pull push & step push pull step

In planning works after the *Movement* series I felt unsure how I could advance my ideas while still working with the basic formula of the blocks. I wanted to make spaces that were more demanding and enclosing, but I also wanted to avoid my use of the block form becoming repetitive. Consequently, I spent a good deal of time drawing, plotting out structures in square units. Eventually - although I kept drawing and thinking in circles, always returning to the basic concept of two areas of plaster with a space between - I found there were structures I had drawn that offered something more. They were escalations; larger spaces made from more blocks that would take longer to move through, that would require three or four movements strung together to negotiate. They were spaces that would give a sense of passage. I developed plans and made two works simultaneously.

push fall pull push (Fig. 23) is the simpler of the two compositions. It consists of sixteen blocks, stacked in two walls that face each other and make a narrow, one metre long corridor. Each wall is made from eight blocks, stacked two across and four rows high, standing at two metres in height. The amount of components involved causes the overall structure to be fairly ungainly, as the individual blocks have a tendency to shift when worked on. To combat this, I braced them against my studio walls with pieces of wood and several

large clamps.

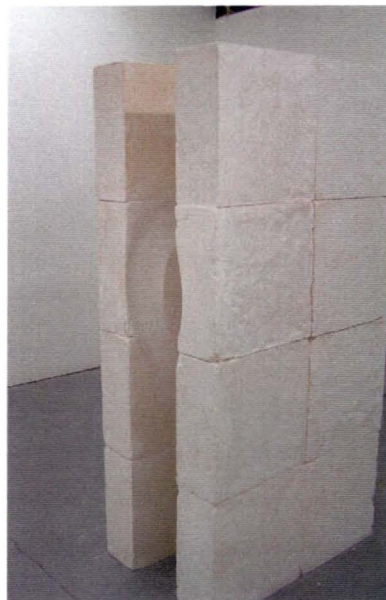


Fig.23

I had set the walls with a gap smaller than any of the earlier structures, knowing the longer movement would extend the time needed to wear into the plaster. I wanted to get as much purchase on the blocks as I could, to remove as much dust with each movement as possible to ensure the process didn't drag out over too many months. As a result the movement was incredibly hard to carry out, and I was only able to move back and forth through the space ten times before needing to rest. Progress was very slow, but I finished the work in two and a half months.

step push pull step (Fig. 24) was the last plaster space I made. A closed-in passage, *step* consists of sixteen blocks. Four larger units, measuring 75cm x 50 cm and 20 cm in thickness, make up the floor and ceiling. Six smaller components, 50cm square and 20cm thick, stacked two across and three high, make up the walls. From the very beginning of working with the blocks I had felt the urge to make enclosed structures, to cap the walls with ceilings and floors. In theory, the idea of working under slabs of plaster, beneath such weight, was exciting. It wasn't until I stepped inside the space that I realised how persistently unnerving the reality is. The space inside the structure, where I worked, was 25cm wide and 1.5 metres high before I began sanding. As well as using my shoulders, upper arms and shoulder blades to work into the plaster, I attached sandpaper to the soles of my shoes.

The height of the roof, being too low for me to stand upright, made the process relentlessly uncomfortable, and, along with the closeness of the walls, slowed and staggered my movements. I was only able to move back and forth through the passage six times before needing to rest, making progress agonisingly slow. Initially, I worked on *step* for two months and, although I felt I hadn't worn deep enough into the plaster, stopped work because of frustration and tiredness. It was only a few months later that I returned to perform the process for an additional month.

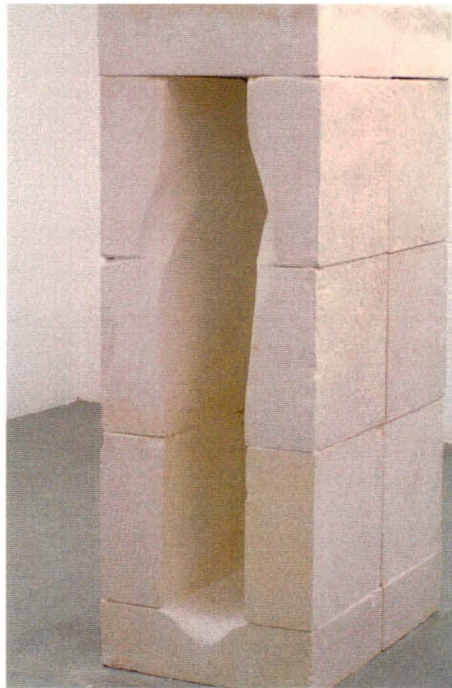


Fig. 24

Part Four - Body

Achieving a shift in the sense of time is not possible simply by building and entering a separate space. Throughout the research I've discovered that this shift is very difficult to bring about. The isolating effects of the separate space create a conducive environment for this experience, but there is the need to use the body.

The process of making – and the exploration of contextual sources – drew my attention to the two main ideas that underpinned the use of my body. The first is the potential for repetition and rhythm within the body – and the correspondence these have to time – and the effect these phenomena have on the experience of it. The second is the idea of the ordeal, of enduring a difficult or painful physical task in order to challenge the limits of the body, to trigger some shift in perception.

The idea of the ordeal, particularly in relation to manufactured space, has a predecessor in the rigors of a journey through the labyrinth:

The concept of the labyrinth as a vehicle for spiritual freedom is deeply ingrained in the history of ideas. The notion of the labyrinth as a refuge predates Romanticism, having existed as early as the mystery cults of Dionysus. "The prisoner who survives incarceration or the rigors of the labyrinth", writes Stephen Eisenman, "transcends bodily cares and is initiated into a realm of spiritual redemption." Thus the labyrinth was seen as the setting for creative acts, a place where "time and the phenomenological world are placed in suspension."¹

Often emulating ritual, performance or body art also frequently identifies spiritual transcendence as the end goal. Although I identify with the sense of shift, of movement into some other realm, implied by transcendence, my own process differs from most performance art in that it is not a rarefied, singular event. Resembling the kind of daily labour that might be involved in working in a factory rather than a performance, my process is also not aimed at escaping the flesh. The longer I labour inside the space, the further I'm drawn inside my own movement, inside my own body.

My lengthy occupation in movement, enabled by the restriction and austerity of the space,

¹ Summers, 2003, p 132

stresses rhythm and repetition. Breathing, blood pulsing, the sounds of my limbs within and against the space, are the only features of the exercise. My own rhythm and repetition seem to control the sense of time. Perhaps this sensation has a scientific explanation:

The scientific study of the physiological rhythms which control such phenomena as sleep/wake cycles, body temperature variations and hormone fluctuations is termed chronobiology. Chronobiologists have fairly recently determined that our body-clocks, which generate an approximately 24 hour rhythm, are physically located in a small part of the brain just behind the eyes. External time, they believe, is detected by the reception of signals through the eye.²

Apart from there being nothing to look at inside my spaces, I usually shut my eyes, letting the plaster guide me. I believe that this lack of visual stimulation allows a withdrawal from the external and a shift into internal time.

The Physical Ordeal – Abramovic and Ulay

The physical methods employed by Marina Abramovic and Ulay have been informing my own working process for several years. As well as exploring rhythm through their own bodies, they incessantly pushed at their own physical and mental limits. In developing my own current working methods I have drawn on a specific group of works executed by the pair during the 1970s and 80s.

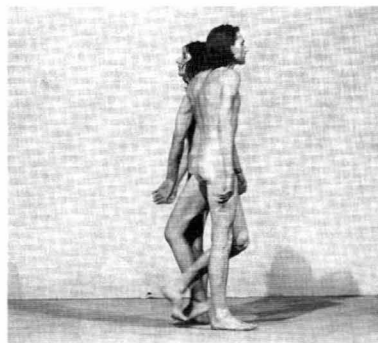


Fig. 25

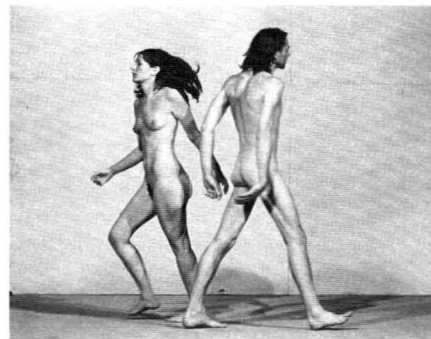


Fig. 26

Relation in Space (Fig. 25 & 26), among the first works produced by the partnership, was

² Ed. Lippincott, Kristen *The Story of Time* (1999) London: Merrell Holberton Publishers Ltd, p 222.

performed in Amsterdam in 1976. Abramovic and Ulay, unclothed, repeatedly traversed an empty white room, meeting each other at its centre - colliding - before moving on. In beginning the performance they moved slowly, walking, bumping into each other harmlessly. As time progressed they gradually sped up, with each collision becoming more violent. The performance lasted 58 minutes, and by the end they ran at full speed, knocking each other to the ground.

Interruption in Space (1977) (Fig. 27) was a logical progression. Rather than collide with each other, Abramovic and Ulay were separated by a section of wall, which they repeatedly moved towards, struck with their bodies, then moved away from. Again unclothed, they hit the wall with their skin. They once more began by moving slowly, touching the wall lightly, gradually escalating until they were hurling their bodies into it, head-on. At first their progress matched and they hit the wall simultaneously, but, as they sped up, they slipped out of sync. They lasted 46 minutes.

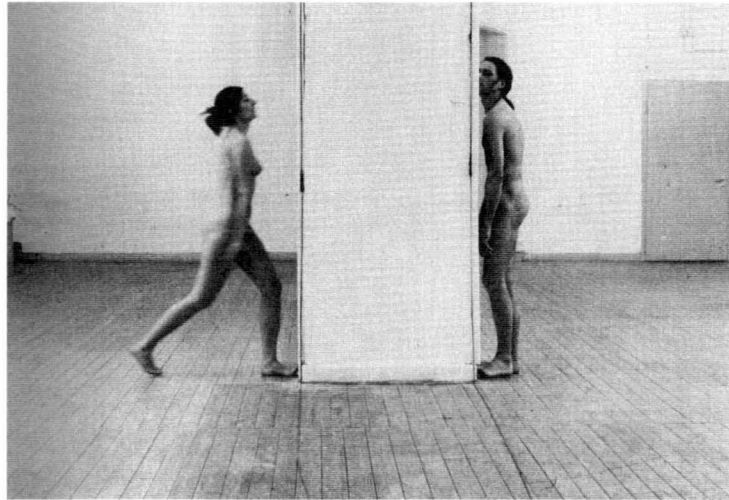


Fig. 27

In *Expansion in Space* (1977) (Fig. 28 & 29), the force they inflict with their bodies has an affect on the environment around them. Identical to two existing columns, Abramovic and Ulay installed two mobile columns - one for each of them - measuring twice their body weight. The pair began by standing back to back, between the mobile columns, before running at and hitting them with their bodies. Like *Interruption*, they hit the columns head-on, not attempting to take the impact on their shoulders or hips, keeping their arms at their sides. They struck, over and over, until they moved them across the room to rest against the existing columns. The task was completed in 32 minutes.

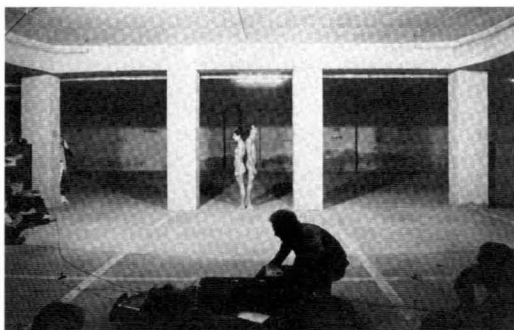


Fig. 28



Fig. 29

I relate to these performances as exercises in testing and finding the limits of the body, and in this way, affirming them. Abramovic and Ulay - in propelling themselves through space to strike an obstacle or one another - experience their physical boundaries. They confirm both the limits of their endurance and their flesh. Abramovic has said of this approach to performance:

*What I was interested in was experiencing the physical and mental limits of the human body and mind... Much later when I got into other cultures, when I went to Tibet, met the Aborigines and was introduced to some Sufi-rituals, I saw that all these cultures pushed the body to the physical extreme in order to make a mental jump, to eliminate the fear of death, the fear of pain and of all the bodily limitation with which we live. We in the Western society are so afraid. Performance was the form enabling me to jump to that other space and dimension.*³

The tasks Abramovic and Ulay went on to perform remained physically taxing, but shifted from the aggressive approach of previous works, to a kind of passive endurance.

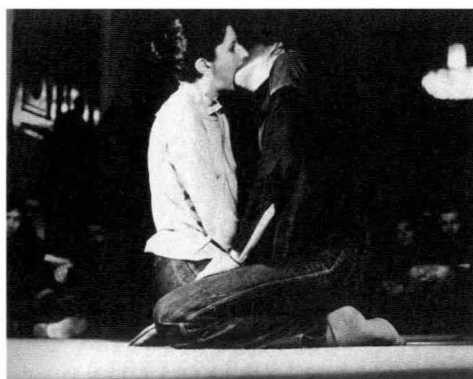


Fig. 30

Breathing In - Breathing Out (1977) (Fig. 30) involved the couple kneeling together on the floor, their mouths pressed tightly together and their noses blocked with filter tips. They formed a kind of closed circuit, breathing into each other's lungs, not able to take in new air. In this strange intimate clinch the amount of carbon dioxide between them slowly increased. They held this position for 19 minutes.

Relation in Time (1977) (Fig. 31, 32 & 33) was also a locking together of their bodies, although sustained for a much greater length of time. For sixteen hours, without an audience, Abramovic and Ulay sat back to back with their long hair woven tightly together, making a thick cable between them. Photographs of this performance, one for each hour, reveal the toll this action took on their bodies. Those of the first few hours depict them alert and relaxed, holding the position easily. In the last few they hunch their shoulders, the skin under their eyes is dark and the clean cable their hair started as is frayed, looking as if it is about to tumble apart. Ulay's face, clean shaven at the beginning of the performance, has grown the shadow of a beard. After the sixteenth hour viewers assembled in the space, and Ulay and Abramovic sat, tied together, for one more hour.

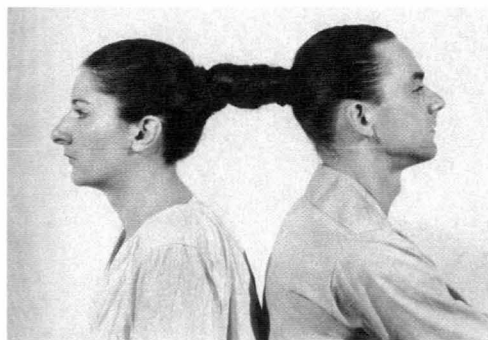


Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

³ Ed. Meschede, Friedrich *Marina Abramovic* (1993) Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, p 29.

Just as their earlier, aggressive performances affirmed the body, these static engagements were also testing their physical limits. Although these latter tasks appear less taxing, to carry them out would have been equally exhausting and painful. Rather than draining the body through expending energy Abramovic and Ulay practiced resistance. They surrendered themselves to situations that guaranteed to inevitably defeat them, and passively endured for as long as they could. In my own mind, I have always found something grimly heroic about embarking on a task that has no real end, or with an end that seems unreachable. It's a throwing of yourself into an experience of time that is without any boundaries.

This expression of continuous time was enacted even more completely in the 90 performances of *Nightsea Crossing* (1982 - 84) (Fig. 34 & 35). Remy Zaugg, a friend of the couple who they asked to act as an observer during one of the performances, described the arrangement of the work:

*A man and a woman, Ulay and Marina Abramovic, are seated, each on a chair, at opposite ends of an elongated table, facing each other, motionless, rigid, petrified. They are. They are doing nothing. Or rather they are doing their utmost to do nothing. So as to be. For seven hours on end. To experience the daily presence of a Work placed on a pedestal or hanging from a nail in the museum.*⁴



Fig. 34

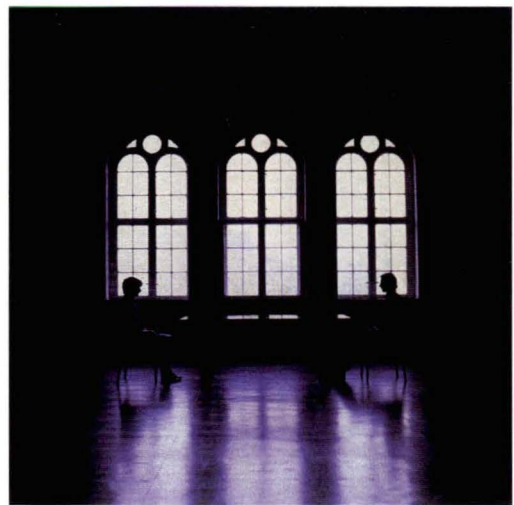


Fig. 35

The pair have been recorded as saying that, even above their early performances, *Nightsea Crossing* was their most painful task. They endured severe muscle cramps for hours on end,

⁴ Debbaut, Jan *Modus Vivendi: Ulay and Marina Abramovic, 1980 – 1985* (1985) Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, p 49.

day after day, but saw this physical discomfort as a way to access another level of consciousness. They used the body as an opening to another place. The performance ran daily according to the hours the particular museum was open to the public. Abramovic has said that: “*nobody saw us start or end the performance. When the public arrived in the museum, we were already there. When they left, we were still there. So they would see this image with no beginning or end.*”⁵ Under their “*masks of inertia borrowed from the tables and chairs*”⁶. They presented themselves as objects outside of time.

Repetition and Rhythm Within the Body

The lengthy daily experience of my making process has made focus on rhythm and repetition somewhat inevitable. Initially, I was aware of the presence of these phenomena in both time and in the operation of my body, but it was not until late in the research that I began to see this as an active relationship. I became aware that I might be able to use physical rhythm to affect my perception of time.

Contextual sources - in conjunction with the experience of making – brought about this realisation. Beckett was once again significant, with my focus drawn to *The Trilogy* (*Malone Dies*, *Molloy* and *The Unnameable*), *Waiting For Godot* and, of course, *Company*. I relate these texts to early film and video works by Nauman, interpreting both artists as expressing similar ideas. My understanding of rhythm and repetition was also shaped by the films *Gerry*, directed by Gus van Sant and *A Space Odyssey: 2001* by Stanley Kubrick.

Working into the spaces I have made is based in rhythm and repetition. I chose movements that are cyclical because they are easier to maintain as one movement flows naturally into the next. The overt rhythm of movement is matched by smaller rhythms, created through breathing, and through my pulsing blood. A rhythm even established itself in the breaks I took between sanding. Each time, and always in the same order, I step out of the space, knock a piece of wood against the sandpaper on my body (one knock for each piece) and on the filters on my mask (one knock for each filter) to remove plaster, take a drink of water, sweep the dust from the space (with three passes of the broom) and begin again. Falling into rhythm performing repetitious physical tasks becomes inevitable.

⁵ Ibid, p 13

⁶ Ibid, p 49.

Rhythmic periodicity lies at the very core of all organic life. The pulsations of protoplasmic substance, the contractile movements of amoebae and worms, the ciliary movements of spermatozoa, the locomotion of quadrupeds and bipeds, the motion of human foetuses, the first impulsive movements of infants, and the primary voluntary motoric habits, electrical activity in the brain, neural transmissions, respiration, heartbeat, circulation, and many other visceral activities, separately and in patterns, are all rhythmically structured. Moreover, not only sexuality, but hunger, thirst, and other needs also follow a periodic pattern in their occurrence, and rhythm characterises the actions designed to satisfy them. Further, on the human level, many phenomena occurring during a relaxation of conscious control have also been observed to be rhythmical... In view of this evidence, Piaget's conclusion that "rhythm characterises the functions that are at the junction between organic and mental life" seems hardly exaggerated. Freud too would have probably concurred in this opinion for he proclaimed repetitiveness, which lies at the core of rhythm, to be a basic organic principle.⁷

Both Beckett and Nauman have expressed rhythm and repetition as an inherent and basic principle of the experience of life and being in the body.

In Beckett's *Molloy* the central character, Moran - simultaneously epitomising both his own and the author's relentless way of thinking - declares that *"to see yourself doing the same thing endlessly over and over again fills you with satisfaction"*⁸ Indeed, a great deal of Beckett's work is filled with descriptions of repetitious physical actions *Company* is punctuated with tales of a daily walk that, in the conditions of the dark space, takes on epic proportions:

You have been out since the break of day and now it is evening. Sole sound in the silence your footfalls . Rather sole sounds for they vary from one to the next. You listen to each one and add it in your mind to the growing sum of those that went before. You halt with bowed head on the verge of a ditch and convert into yards. On the basis now of two steps per yard. So many since dawn to add to yesterday's. To yesteryear's. To yesteryear's. Days other than today and so akin. The giant tot in miles. In leagues How often round the earth already.⁹

This passage became very important to me in the making process. I found myself captured

⁷ Kreidler & Kreidler, 1972, p 150.

⁸ van Assche, 1998, p 64

⁹ Beckett, 1979, p 19

by the idea of this epic walk, in imagining the sounds of the footfalls beating out, one after another. The sense of performing a cyclical act, that once begun has no definite end, was something I had sensed in swimming, and was experiencing again in making. The words “*To yesteryears. To yesteryear’s. To yesteryear’s*” became like a work chant. I would say it silently in time with my movements, and it would make the work easier. It made me begin to count things; the number of movements I would make in an hour, the number of breaths to each movement. Even the blisters I developed came to seem like small pockets of accumulation in my body.

In reading *Company* I always imagined that the rhythmical voice telling the story comes from the body of the man inside the dark space. I do not mean that it comes from his mouth, or is spoken silently in his head, but that it somehow comes from the thickness of him. From inside his ribcage. I imagine this because he is in darkness and does not speak, dormant except for occasional stints of crawling. His face would not be the centre of his experiences, it would be his breathing, his lungs. The memories of his own accumulated time emanate from his own body. When I perform the making process, and when I swim, my lungs become the centre. The movements are familiar and I don’t need to see. I close my eyes. I am not speaking, not listening to anything but the sounds my body makes. It is a slow slipping down, from the face into the dark cavity of the ribcage. All my movement, my air, radiates out from that cavity. It is a drawing back inside the body.

Nauman also explored rhythm and repetition using his own body, evidenced in many of his early film and video works. Descriptions of any of the actions he performed and recorded would be at home in a Beckett novel.



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

Bouncing in the Corner No. 1 (1968) (Fig. 36), filmed with the camera fixed on a tripod and positioned to frame Nauman’s body from the neck down, records the artist repeatedly

bouncing up and down in the corner of a white room. Nauman jumps back into the wall, slapping his back and hands against it to make sounds that reinforce the rhythm of his movements. *Stamping in the Studio* (1968) (Fig. 37) depicts Nauman, alone in his studio, stamping out a beat against the floor with his feet. As the film progresses Nauman's stamps become quicker, his rhythms more complex, moving him in diagonal lines and spirals across the studio and the frame of the camera. *Bouncing Two Balls Between Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms* (1967-68) (Fig. 38) records the artist setting a rhythm in motion only to lose control of it. He begins by bouncing two balls against the floor inside a square area delineated in tape, throwing them as hard as he can while trying to maintain a pattern in the sounds they make ricocheting off the two surfaces. Eventually Nauman loses control of the balls thus breaking the rhythm.

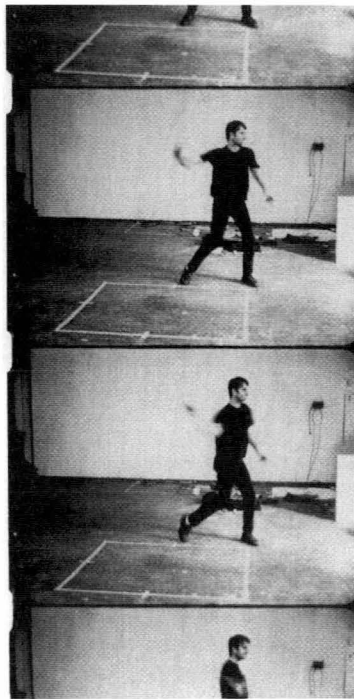


Fig. 38

The repetition and rhythm Nauman creates with his body in these works mirrors Beckett's writing. Like the process of amplification in repeated words, Nauman's actions merge. Individual movements accumulate and form one continuous activity. His body effects the sense of time within the work by disrupting the flow of moments, by placing time in suspension through uninterrupted repetition.

It's the inherent futility of the actions performed by Nauman – and those described by Beckett – that also acts to place them outside of time. They are pointless, achieve nothing, and are

often cyclical and self-absorbing. *Revolving Upside Down* (1969) (Fig. 39) is a film of Nauman, leaning over so that his body forms a right angle, using one leg as an anchor to revolve himself around like a spinning top. As in many of Nauman's films, the actions are filmed upside-down, a device the artist uses to disrupt the space and make it seem as if the figure is defying gravity by moving on the ceiling. *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1967-68) (Fig. 40) records Nauman walking while exaggerating the movement of his hips and the length of his stride, whilst *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* (1967-68) (Fig. 41) records him using the square, made in tape on his studio floor, as guidelines for steps to perform a simple dance. Also, in a direct nod to Beckett, Nauman made *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)* (1968) (Fig. 42, 43 & 44). Referring to descriptions from *Molloy*, of the main character's struggle to move, he imitates the strange gait, bent over, with legs that remain straight, rotating in curves around the studio. His progress is very slow, and the exercise is entirely futile, with the constrained actions forcing him into moving in circles.

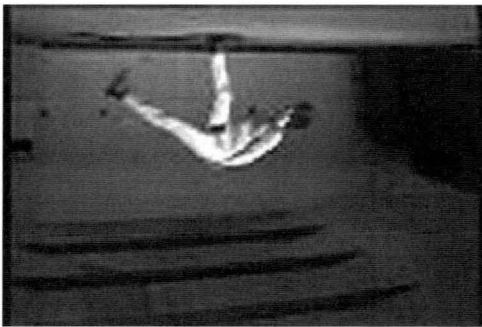


Fig. 39

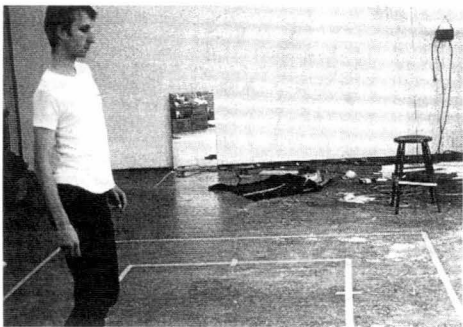


Fig. 40

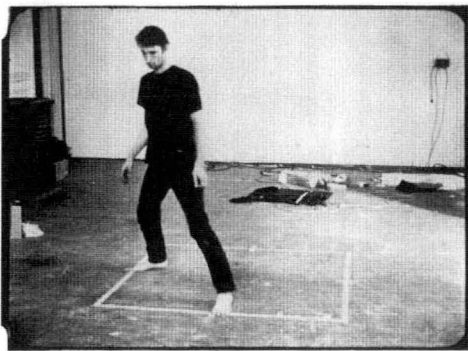


Fig. 41

In *Company* Beckett's character decides to crawl inside the dark and escape the voice, to try and find an end to the space and discover some indication of its size. He moves on his hands and knees through the darkness, but fails to find anything, deciding to return to lying

on his back. *Waiting For Godot* tells of a similarly fruitless event, with two characters Vladimir and Estragon beginning and ending the story waiting in the middle of nowhere for Godot to come and meet them. They fill in the time with a conversation that ricochets back and forth between them but never comes to any point. Beckett applied this idea to chess, envisioning “a fascinating variant: not to move the pieces at all, but leave them in their initial positions. It was a strategy designated to avoid the final, fatal phase of the endgame.”¹⁰

In these works repetition and rhythm are used to generate a kind of suspension. The pointlessness and repetition of their actions means that the narrative hovers in place. Suspension creates a sense of timelessness, of the space within the work being separate to our own in the ordinary world, not subject to external time.

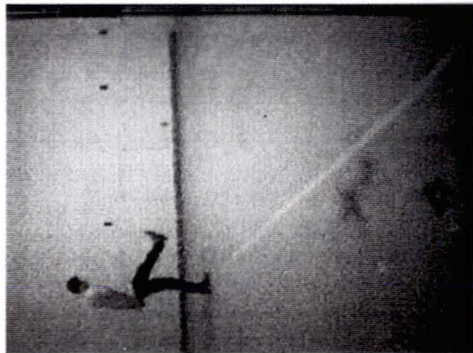


Fig. 42

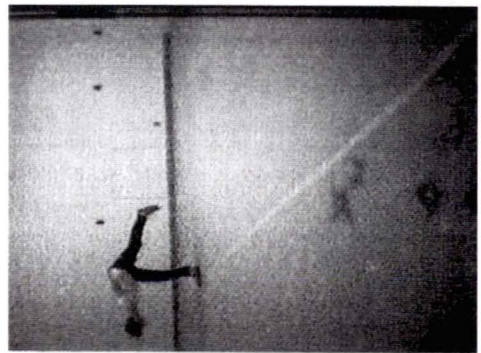


Fig. 43

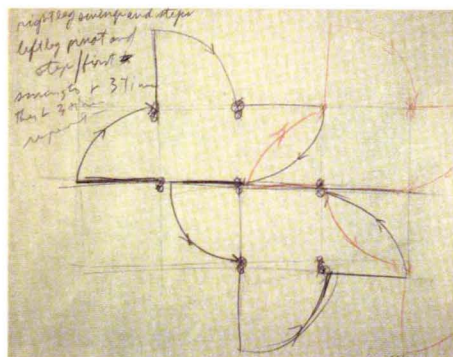


Fig. 44

Gerry and *Odyssey* correspond more to the work of Beckett than Nauman. Unlike Nauman's instantaneous sense of suspension, the warping of time is gradual, creeping up on the viewer.

¹⁰ van Assche, 1998, p 61.

Kubrick's *A Space Odyssey: 2001* (1968) does, however, bear resemblances to Nauman's use of space, evident in the 70s "room" works, and his distortion of movement in filmed performances. The second phase of the film, in which man has evolved to master space travel, takes place in a "weightless world, one in which the basic coordinates of horizontality and verticality are suspended. Through that suspension the framework of our sensed operational reality is dissolved."¹¹

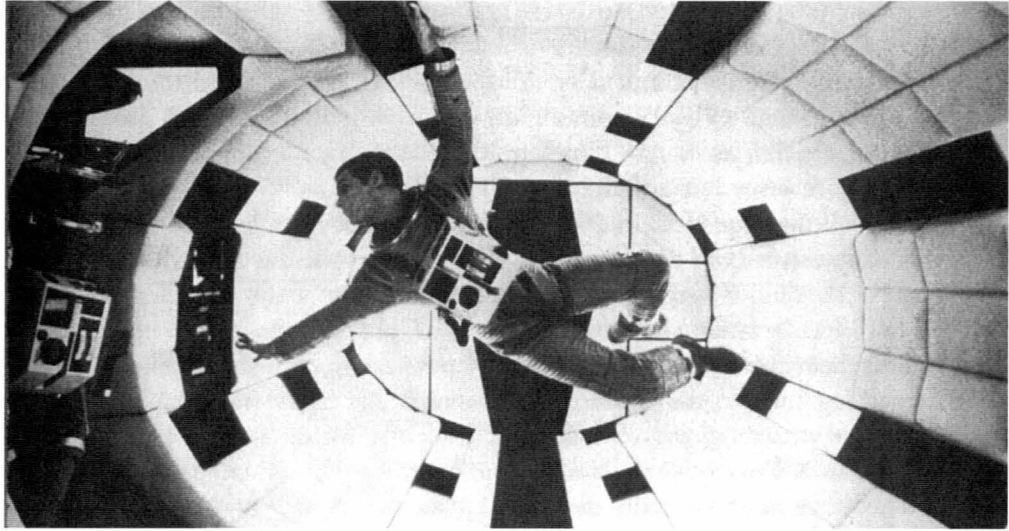


Fig. 45

My interest in *Odyssey* lies in the effect this space has on the bodies inhabiting it. In conjunction with heavy space suits, the conditions of zero gravity radically alters the movement of the astronauts. Ordinary actions, which might take seconds to complete in the earth's gravity, are slowed down markedly. They gain characteristics absent in normal, functional movement, becoming closer to dance (Fig. 45). Annette Michelson wrote in *ArtForum* that:

The astronaut's movement is invested with an intensity of interest (sustaining itself through every second of its repetition), a "gravity" which is that of total absorption in operational movement (task performance) as a constant reinvention of equilibrium in the interest of functional efficiency. The stress is on the importance, the fascination of what's difficult, which is to say, the simplest operations... The astronaut's movements, slowed by weightlessness, reinvent the conditions of their efficiency. This slowness and majesty with which the space-craft itself moves, are

¹¹ "Bodies in Space, Film as Carnal Knowledge" Annette Michelson in *ArtForum* Feb 1969 Vol. 7, No. 6, p 60

*predicated, of course, upon the speed of space travel itself. And the film ultimately moves with that momentum, that apparent absence of speed which one experiences only in the fastest elevators, or jet planes.*¹²

As well as its slowing of movement, it is the absolute silence of outer space that emphasises physical rhythm. As the astronauts move through space the only sound is that of the breath being forced in and out of their lungs. Like the footfalls in *Company*, the breaths form a continuous rhythmical pacing out of moments, and the viewer is completely drawn in to the astronauts sense of time. When they are calm their breathing is slow and lulling, time is slowed to an almost comatose pace. When they sense danger and their breathing is sharp and rapid it speeds up, passing rapidly.

This same effect is present in Van Sant's *Gerry* (2003), a film that could have been written by Beckett. The plot follows two friends, referring to one another identically as Gerry, who drive to a hiking trail in the desert. They follow the trail for a time, but leave it when they become bored and attempt to find a shortcut back to their car. The landscape is featureless scrub - an empty space akin to that of *Odyssey* - and they soon get hopelessly lost. They walk through the desert for three days, searching for the highway (Fig. 46).



Fig. 46

Like *Odyssey*, the characters in *Gerry* spend great deals of time in silence. The little dialogue that does take place is restricted to the inane chatter of bored friends and confused attempts to navigate the desert. The bulk of the film is filled only with the sounds of their bodies. Their breath rasps in and out, their feet crunch down onto rocks. Their two bodies fall hypnotically in and out of sync, sounding a weird fluctuating rhythm.

¹² Ibid, p 62.

*Rhythm has to do with an unfolding in time, the patterned course of an experience; modes are qualities of that experience – its sense of swiftness, solidity, opening, closing, speed, forcefulness, barrenness, lightness and so forth, on a dynamic scale of moreness and lessness.*¹³

Van Sant's direction is incredibly restrained. He settles into long shots, some lasting up to ten minutes, that either move with the actors at a consistent angle, or statically frame the area they dwell in. These long shots seem to isolate the rhythm, allowing the viewer to experience its consistent unfolding. Van Sant has stated that *"There is a rhythm, but it's so elongated that it's more like an impressionistic rhythm."*¹⁴

Most of the film is filled with the two characters walking. As time progresses there is an increasing sense of doom, and the actions of the characters seem progressively more futile. They walk on for days only to stand in a place identical to the one they left. As with the astronauts in *Odyssey*, the viewer's sense of time is shackled to the physical rhythms of the Gerrys. As their bodies slowly deteriorate the gaps between footfalls and breaths become more and more drawn out, stretched to an almost unbearable slowness. Their bodies are like machines grinding to a halt. This slowing communicates a very different kind of suspension to *Odyssey*, and to that expressed by Nauman and Beckett. Belying continuousness, their physical rhythms creep toward stillness, toward the permanent suspension of death.

Being Inside the Body Inside the Space

*You have been out since the break of day and now it is evening. Sole sound in the silence your footfalls. Rather sole sounds for they vary from one to the next. You listen to each one and add it in your mind to the growing sum of those that went before. You halt with bowed head on the verge of the ditch and convert into yards. On the basis now of two steps per yard. So many since dawn to add to yesterday's. To yesteryear's. To yesteryear's. Days other than today and so akin. The giant tot in miles. In leagues. How often round the earth already.*¹⁵

My hands rest on the block. On the edge of it closest to my body. Shoulder width apart. I push forward and move my hands out over the block. I press down hardest on the outside

¹³ Dissanayake, Ellen *Art and Intimacy* (2000) Washington: University of Washington Press, p. 22

¹⁴ www.splicedonline.com

edges of my palms and let my fingers skim the plaster. My thumbs point up at the ceiling. As I push my hands come together. Curve in towards each other. At the limit of my reach my fingers press together and my hands form a cup. I pull back towards my body. Keep my fingers pressed against their opposites and push down into the plaster with the outer edges of my palms. Dust gathers in my cupped hands. I pull back until my hands fall in my lap and dump white dust there. I rest my hands on the block. On the edge of it closest to my body.

*Head sunk totting up the tally on the verge of the ditch. So many times already
round the earth. Topcoat once green stiff with age and grime from chin to insteps.
Battered once buff block hat and quarter boots still a match. No other garments if
any to be seen. Out since the break of day and night now falling. Reckoning ended
on together from nought anew*¹⁶

I hold my hand pressed together. My thumbs are linked around each other and my fingers point down at the block. I push my weight down into my fingertips. I push hard enough to make them bend and flush red. Tips of my nails pinched white. I move my hand in circles. I stir the solid plaster. When my hands move away from my body I rise up on my haunches. When they curve in close I rock back. I keep my shoulders over my hands. I lean down into them. I make circle after circle.

*The last time you went out the snow lay on the ground. You now on your back in
the dark stand that morning on the sill having pulled the door gently to behind you.
You lean back against the door with bowed head making ready to set out. By the
time you open your eyes your feet have disappeared and the skirts of your
greatcoat come to rest on the surface of the snow. The dark scene seems lit from
below.*¹⁷

My hands rest on the block. On the edge of it closest to my body. Shoulder width apart. I push forward out across the surface. I lean down hard on the heels of my hands. I let my fingers skim the plaster and give all my weight to my palms. As my hands push out my body stretches. I push up on my haunches to reach the other side of the block. As they move away my hands come together. They make straight lines that converge. The shape of an upside down V. The block ends before my hands touch. My fingers meet in the air just beyond the plaster. I pull back. My back curves. I rock back on my haunches. My hands separate and move apart. I pull back until they slip from the plaster and fall in my lap. They dump piles of

¹⁵ Beckett, 1979, p. 19.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 31.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 47.

dust there. I rest them on the block. On the edge of it closest to my body.

*You see yourself at that last outset leaning against the door with closed eyes waiting for the word from you to go. To be gone Then the snowlit scene You lie in the dark with closed eyes and see yourself there as described making ready to strike out and away across the expanse of light.*¹⁸

I kneel in front of the blocks. They stand with a gap between them and I sit looking through the centre of it. I lean forward and my shoulders find the plaster. Right shoulder pressed against the right block. Left shoulder pressed against the left block. My head moves into the space between them. The plaster traps sound. My own breathing fills my ears. I angle my shoulders into the gap. First the left then the right. The blocks press and pin me in. I push forward using my legs. They strain and tense. My muscles heat. I push until my hands hit the floor and my shoulders have ground a path along the inside of the blocks. They move in a curve that starts high then dips. My head breaks into the air on the other side. I am breathing hard. My lungs reach for air. I pull back. I curve my spine. I use my back to pull my shoulders out. They curve up the blocks. When they leave the plaster they pop. They expand the moment they slip from the blocks. I pull my head from the gap. My ears feel like they've been full of water and have suddenly unblocked. I am kneeling again. I rest a few seconds. I lean forward and my shoulders find the plaster.

*You hear again the click of the door pulled gently to and the silence before the steps can start. Next thing you are on your way across the white pasture afrolic with lambs. You take the course you always take which is a beeline for the gap or ragged point in the quickset that forms the western fringe.*¹⁹

The blocks stand in two columns. There is a gap between them and I stand upright looking through its centre. I bend down and make a right angle with my body. My shoulders press into the blocks halfway up the columns. My head is in the space between. I angle my shoulders into the gap. First the left then the right. They are clamped in there. I bend my legs and push up. My shoulders grind against the plaster. I tense my neck muscles. I push upwards toward the ceiling. As I push my back straightens. My head is tipped back from the effort and I concentrate on the light globes and rafters. I push until I am on the tips of my toes and my body is straight. Then I pull down. I try to let myself fall but the blocks hold me. I have to use my back and legs to jolt my shoulders. They move in bursts. The columns shudder with each jolt. As I move down my back bends. When I am halfway down the columns I pull

¹⁸ Ibid, p 48.

out I wrench my shoulders from the plaster and stand upright I arch and stretch my back. I bend down. My shoulders press into the blocks halfway up the columns

*Thither from your entering the pasture you need normally from eighteen hundred to two thousand paces depending on your humour and the state of the ground. But on this last morning many more will be required. Many many more.*²⁰

I stand inside the wooden frame My back is pressed against the slab and I can feel the cold coming from inside it. It passes through sandpaper and coveralls and cools my shoulder blades I reach out both arms and hold onto the frame. Brace my body. I bend my right leg. The right side of my body dips. My lower back and right shoulder blade scrape down the slab. I dip down until I almost loose my balance All my weight rests on my right leg I dig my right shoulder blade into the plaster and push back up. My knees and thighs strain. I tense my arms. I stop pushing when my leg is straight and my body is level I bend my left leg. The left side of my body dips My lower back and left shoulder blade scrape down the slab I dip down until I almost loose my balance. All my weight rests on my left leg. I dig my left shoulder blade into the plaster and push back up My knees and thighs strain. I tense my arms. I stop pushing when my leg is straight and my body is level. I bend my right leg.

*The beeline is so familiar to your feet that if necessary they could keep to it and you sightless with error on arrival of not more than a few feet north or south And indeed without any such necessity unless from within this is what they normally do and not only here. For you advance if not with closed eyes though this as often as not at least with them fixed on the ground before your feet. That is all of nature you have seen.*²¹

I stand at one end of the corridor. I knit my fingers and clasp my hands. I keep my arms straight and hold them out in front of my face. I pull my arms forward to make my shoulders smaller. I step forward and angle them into the corridor First the left then the right I push forward The corridor is too narrow to move through upright. I have to lean forward at an angle Push with my legs behind the rest of my body. The narrowness of the space changes my stride I take four steps over a distance that should take one. As I reach the end I gain momentum My shoulders rise up the insides of the walls. Instead of passing through I fall. I push my shoulders down in a curve. For a moment my head leaves the space but the rest of my body stays clamped. I push down until my body makes a right angle I back out of the

¹⁹ Ibid, p 48

²⁰ Ibid, p 49

²¹ Ibid, p 49

space. I have to jerk and jolt my shoulders. My bent body can't pull with enough power to make the movement smooth. When my legs leave the plaster I press the side of one knee against the front of the blocks. I use it to lever my shoulders. When they leave the plaster I lose my balance. I fall backwards because my legs are tired. I stand up. I knit my fingers and clasp my hands.

Since finally you bowed your head. The fleeting ground before your feet. From time to time. You do not count your steps any more. For the simple reason they number each day the same Average day in day out the same. The way being always the same. You keep count of the days and every tenth day multiply. And add.²²

I put my left foot up onto the plaster floor. I bend down. The front of my right shoulder presses into the front of the right hand wall. I slip my left shoulder inside the passage and step up. My right shoulder is higher than my left. My torso is twisted. I push my shoulders upwards against the wall until I am standing inside the passage. The roof is low. My neck is bent forward and my chin touches my chest. My eyes are on my feet. I step forward. My arms grind along the walls. I move towards the other end of the passage. When I get there my shoulders peak into the space outside. They slip onto the backs of blocks before I pull them back in. I move backwards. The filters on my dust mask scrape along the walls. I keep my arms tensed and pressed against the blocks. I back out until I feel the floor fall away. I step down with my right foot and then with my left. My neck straightens. I pull my shoulders out one at a time. First the left then the right. I stand up. I put my right foot up onto the plaster floor.

You do not hear your footfalls anymore. Unhearing unseeing you go your way. Day after day. The same way. As if there were no other way any more. For you there is no other any more. You used never to halt except to make your reckoning. So as to plod on from nought anew. This need removed as we have seen there is none in theory to halt anymore. Save perhaps a moment at the outermost point. To gather yourself together for the return.²³

²² Ibid, p 50

²³ Ibid, p 51

Rest

In completing *push* and *step* I felt that the working process I'd been practicing since beginning the research had revealed the results I wanted to achieve, with the block works capturing both a sense of process and conveying the time space continuum that I sought. Yet to bring the project to a conclusion there was a desire to make one final work that would explore my central ideas and continue the concepts inherent in the plaster works, but in an alternative form that would open up new possibilities for my practice beyond the completion of this body of research

In moving away from a kind of reliance on the working process I wanted to become more involved in the manufacture of space. Up to this point I had given primary consideration to the process of developing the plaster works, taking deliberate steps to make each one more isolating than the last. Yet the form these spaces took was constrained within a format that would record the process of my moving within the space. The last work was made without this restriction. Further, it opened up new possibilities for exploring the qualities of liminal space.

Titled *Rest*, my most recent work consists of a three-metre long closed corridor which leads into a dome-shaped space. The roof of the dome is three metres high, and its diameter 1.9m wide. Its exterior is hidden from the viewer by the gallery walls, with only the entrance to the corridor visible. The interior of the structure is coated in black felt to absorb light and sound, but small cracks are left in the roof of the dome to allow a sense of the height and curvature of the space. The corridor is intended to limit the amount of light in the dome, but is also meant to convey a sense of passage, of movement from one kind of space into another. Once inside the space of the dome it is my hope that the viewer pauses there, experiencing the space. The title of *Rest* refers to this pause, to the stage of contemplation and stillness that is reached after much hard labour.

The form of *Rest* is influenced by several contextual sources. It is an interpretation of the *Memory Spaces* described by Yates, which I read of during the first months of my candidature. It is also an emulation of the dark space in *Company*, and of the space of water under the pontoon that I experienced as a child. It is an attempt to transfer the qualities of these spaces into a stable, accessible structure.

The shape of the dome was chosen partially because Beckett alludes to the space in

Company as having a curved ceiling, but also because of its long history of defining liminal spaces. In *Real Spaces* Summers writes:

*In very long traditions in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia, round structures have been associated with burials. Mounds of earth or cairns of stone might be supposed to have protected the dead, perhaps indicating that the body was thought to be the place of the spirit, even after death, and the pile of earth or stone its abode, where it lingered. If earth or stone are piled to any height they take the form of a circle, and if the body is made most secure by that means, the power of the dead is also hemmed in by a near-uniform barrier. The dead might thus be circumscribed, at the same time that the realisation of this boundary reserved a space, tending to make it useless for other purposes*²⁴

My interest in the dome is not centred in death, although since beginning the research I have become increasingly convinced that some sense of it is present in every kind of liminal space. The dome has brought my work to a focus – after beginning the project exploring the interconnectedness of space, the body and time – on the idea of merging the ordinary world with other entirely separate realms

The stone cairns Summers writes of are examples of this merging. The protrusion of these spaces of death into the landscape, into the space of the living world, allows death a presence in daily life. It's as if the curved forms have risen up from their timeless realm, boiled to the surface. A second example is the kind of architectural arrangement found in medieval monasteries. Spaces designed for the daily functions of living – for sleeping, bathing and eating – exist alongside crypts and spaces for prayer, circumscribed within a single compound. In this way realms of the dead and of God are embodied by actual, physical space. Their proximity and intimate relationship to daily life means they seep into the ordinary world.

Rest has been modelled on these kinds of spaces, and is meant to form the timelessness attributed to the experience of death. In my intentions I identify with an assertion of Kern's regarding the work of William Blake: "*That void is God's time – the ultimate expanded present wherein what appears to us as sequence is an unchanging whole.*"²⁵ Yet, in terms of entering and inhabiting this space, I place upmost importance on maintaining a sense of aliveness, of an animated experience of suspension rather than letting the sensation of death seep in. The difficulty of my making process can be understood as a constant battling against

²⁴ Summers, 2003, p 186

this sensation and the stillness in *Rest* as having laboured enough to achieve a kind of stasis.

²⁵ Kern, 1983, p 86

Part Five - Conclusion

Since embarking on the research my ideas have developed and changed significantly. In beginning my fascination lay in the basic relationship I perceived between the body, space and time. I saw this relationship as the combination of separate elements, of distinct phenomena very different from one another. Initially, my understanding of their interconnection was unrefined. It was drawn from simple physical experiences, difficult to analyse because of their inherent nature. My first steps were to set about understanding this relationship by manufacturing space and engaging my body with it.

Throughout the course of my research this process of acting out the interconnection was straightforward, remaining relatively constant in contrast to the development of the objects. The space consistently escalated, starting as tablets, then bookends, body-sized slabs, corridors and closed passageways. This escalation concluded with an wholly enclosing dome. Although straightforward, this progression towards the surrounding, separate space was hugely important, causing the focus of my engagement with it to move away from mark-making or sculptural shaping.

Through considering contextual sources and placing my body in increasingly enclosing and overwhelming arrangements of space, I became aware of the potential to separate myself from the ordinary experience of time. I came to understand the spaces as liminal, as places distinct to the ordinary world. In making my work I came to aspire to the kind of space described by Beckett in *Company*, to a space that holds or conducts moments of time so that they resemble currents in water.

In striking upon the idea that I could manufacture space – create this experience for myself – I also began to question the experience of time. Methods of making and contextual reading led to a sense of compression of time and space. I came to the idea that space possessed temporal qualities, and that time could be best understood through its translation into spatial terms, thus a single force bleeding into one another.

I have endeavoured to explore this bleeding through my spaces, through the particular way I have interacted with them. The making - a process of negotiating space – doubles as a gradual physical building of an experience of time. This experience relies equally on both the separation of the space and on the body. In identifying my working methods with artists like Abramovic and Ulay, I came to understand the tasks I perform as a way to affirm the limits of

the body, to become absorbed in my own physical operations. Intense and prolonged focus on these operations, enforced by the austerity of the space, caused a concentration on physical rhythm and repetition. As a result, I became aware of the correspondence between these bodily operations and the rhythm and repetition inherent to the experience of time. I seized upon this correspondence – one that I also found in work by Beckett and Nauman, and in *Gerry* and *Odyssey* – as a means to manipulate time

The outcome of this research is a series of six sculptural works – five made from plaster and one made from wood and felt. I intend for this series to be understood as a continuous progression, as objects that depend on the context they form for one another. As a group, they document my gradual understanding and development of an enclosing, liminal space. They also communicate my three years of labouring towards an understanding of the interconnection between my body, space and the experience of time. The exhibition – the progression of the objects – is documentation of my slow moving away from ordinary time. Ultimately, in both the making of my work and gathering together of surrounding information, the research has led me to the idea that, in being held in the grasp of physical rhythm, there is available the very real experience of being suspended in time.

I see this work as contributing to the ongoing development of art practice based in the body, in its physical operations. In this sense I align myself most closely with work like that of Abramovic and Ulay, with the exploration of bodily limits. However, although I identify with their particular application of the body, as I do with a number of performance artists, I consider there to be elements of my own work that are incongruous. I see my practice deviating from these influences because of its basis in ordinary physical operation. Although there already exists many examples of artists using common everyday actions to make their work, these actions are mostly imbued with a sense of theatricality or distinctness to the functional actions of ordinary existence.

My process of making has moved away from this sense of the singular, rarefied art-event. I perform my actions away from the public eye, considering them a daily task to be performed like an occupation or a function of living. Although I use materials like plaster and felt to form a space for this practice, I do not perform the making to imbue these materials with any kind of aura. I intend for the actions of the body to be the focus, and for the objects to be secondary. The objects are akin to negative space. The actions they frame, although absent at the point of exhibition, are the positive, the activated space.

This development points the way ahead for my practice after the completion of this research. I will be travelling to France in late 2006 to tour medieval monasteries and experience the spaces inside them. I wish to more clearly understand the sensations involved in occupying a place that coalesces ordinary and liminal space, and the methods used in its architectural defining. My intention in travelling to these places is to learn ways, within my own practice, of bringing these spaces even closer, so that liminal and ordinary space are somehow juxtaposed.

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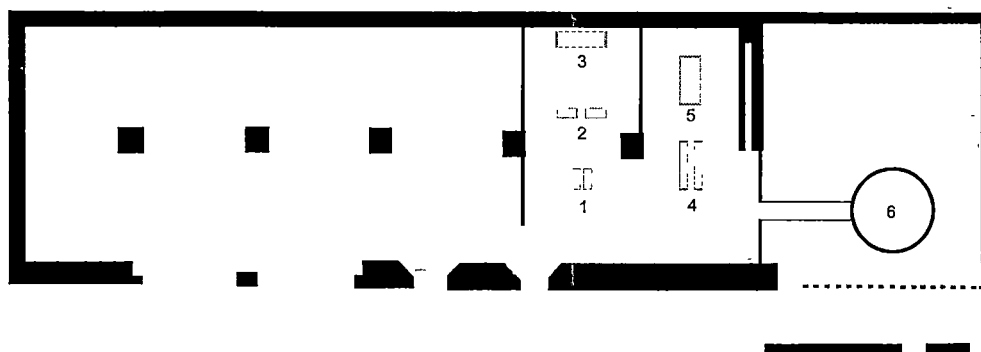
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Plimsol Gallery
Centre for the Arts
University of Tasmania



1. *Movement One* (2004) 60cm x 60cm x 70cm, plaster.
2. *Movement Two* (2004) 1.8m x 1.5m x 25cm, plaster.
3. *Movement Three* (2004) 1.9m x 1.3m x 50cm, plaster and wood.
4. *push fall pull push* (2005) 2m x 55cm x 1m, plaster
5. *step push pull step* (2005) 1.9m x 55cm x 2m, plaster.
6. *Rest* (2005-6) various dimensions, wood and felt.

Support Work (Not Included in the Exhibition)

Accumulation Study One (2003) 25cm x 60cm x 60cm, plaster and canvas.
Accumulation study Two (2003) 25cm x 60cm x 60cm, plaster and canvas
Accumulation Study Three (2003) 25cm x 60cm x 60cm, plaster and canvas.

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2003 – present
Studying towards a PhD in Fine Arts
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Honours (first class)
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1999 – 2001
BVA in Fine Arts
Queensland College of Art, Gold Coast
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Awards/ Scholarships:

2006 Rosamond McCulloch Studio Residency

2003 – present
Research Higher Degree Scholarship
University of Tasmania

2002
The Bachelor's Medal for Fine Arts
Griffith University, Gold Coast

Exhibitions:

Solo Exhibitions

Body of Work
June 2005
Inflight gallery, Hobart

Black and White Secrets
November 2000
Doggett Street Gallery, Brisbane

Group Exhibitions

Propinquity and Distance
Oct – Nov 2004
Carnegie Gallery, Hobart

timepiece
Sept – Oct 2004
CAST Gallery, North Hobart

Palmer's Kiss
June – July 2004
Carnegie Gallery, Hobart

*Tangent – The Honours Graduate
Exhibition*
November 2002
The Plimsol Gallery, Hobart

*Discombobulated – The QCA
Graduate Exhibition*
Oct – Nov 2001
Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Bundall

PICA Hatched '03
June 2003
Perth Institute of Creative Arts

From the Coast and Beyond
May 2002
The Star Gallery, Southbank
Brisbane